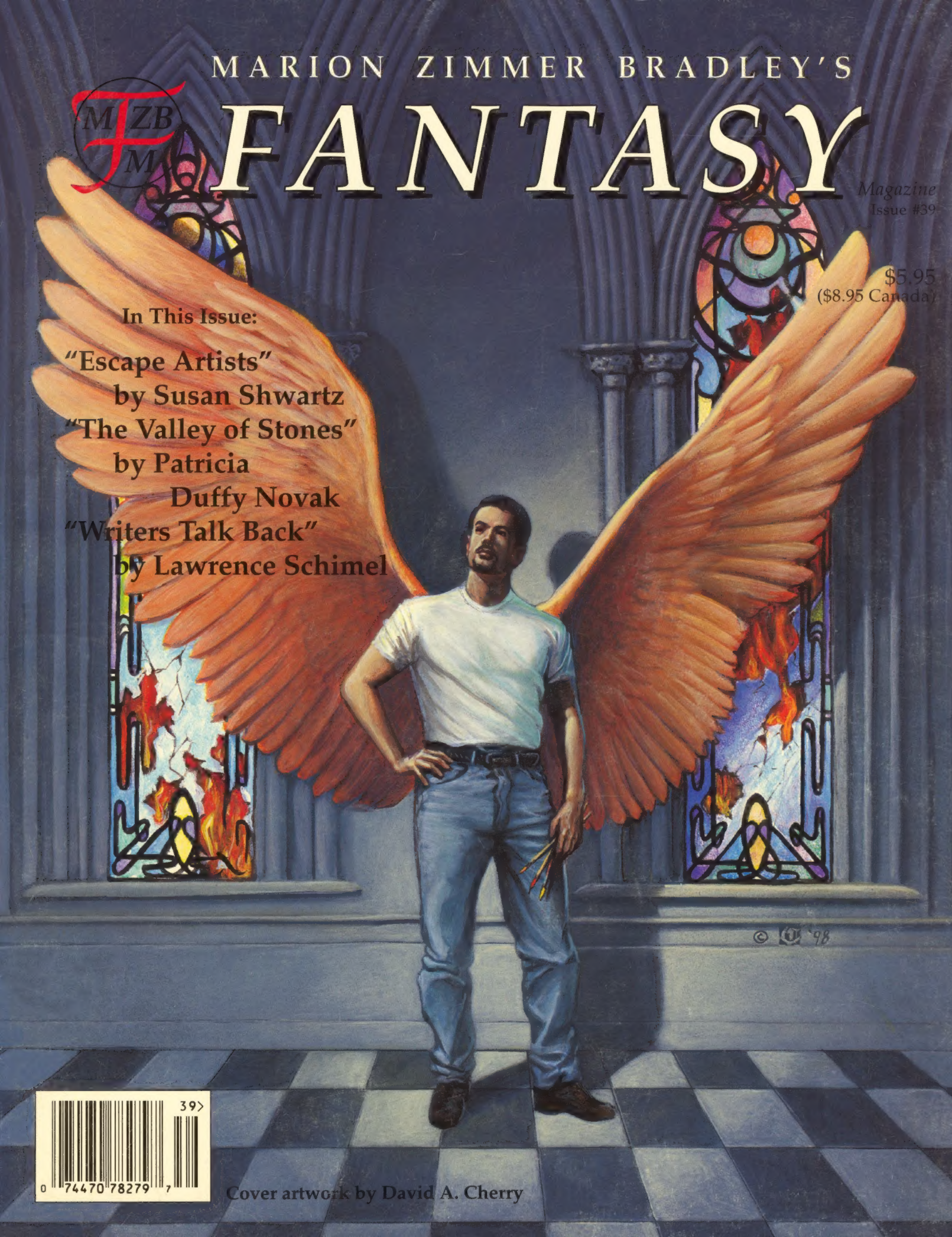
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FANTASY
Magazine
Issue #39
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In This Issue:
"Escape Artists"
by Susan Shwartz
"The Valley of Stones"
by Patricia
Duffy Novak
"Writers Talk Back"
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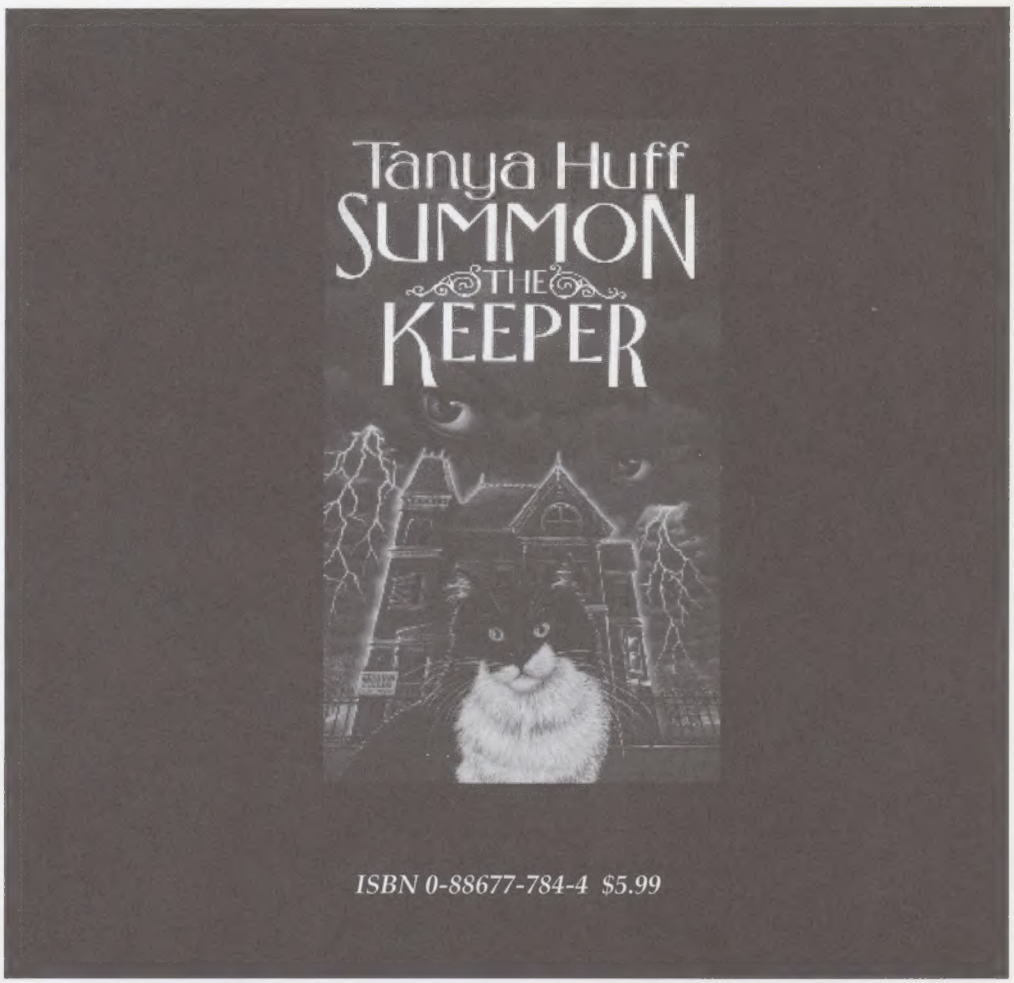

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MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine

EDITORIAL

You may have heard that we are staging a convention in this area September 4-6, 1998. In fifty years, more or less, of life within science fiction and fantasy fandom, one of my major delights has been the get-togethers known as conventions.

For those of you who have never been to a convention, here's what happens. They have something in common with scholarly or literary conferences, because the attendees present papers, or attend panels on some of the more serious scholarly aspects of the literature; but to those of us who grew up at conventions, here's what goes on. The convention's presenters, sometimes but by no means always some local fan group, rent a hotel for a weekend, and, as one writer, Joan Winston, said in her book about *Star Trek* conventions, "throw a party for twelve thousand of your most intimate friends."

Our convention, of course, will not be anything like that size; we're planning what's called a "relaxacon", limited to three hundred attendees. The San Francisco Bay Area has more fans and writers of sf and fantasy per square mile than any other part of the world; for some unknown reason sf and fantasy is an American phenomenon; though Canada and the UK have their share of readers and even some writers, much of the field is American, and European sf is mostly the all-but-unreadable (by most American fans anyhow) **PERRY RHODAN**. (Forgive me, Forry, but I personally never met anyone who would read the stuff.)

So we're having a convention here; won't you come and join us? Many of the MZB's *FANTASY* people, including our whole staff and many of our writers, will be there, and I think it will be a lot of fun. If you want more information, send us a SASE or see our web site. If you send e-mail, one of our staff will get back to you — but not me, I don't do computers. But I *do* do cons.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S
FANTASY
Magazine

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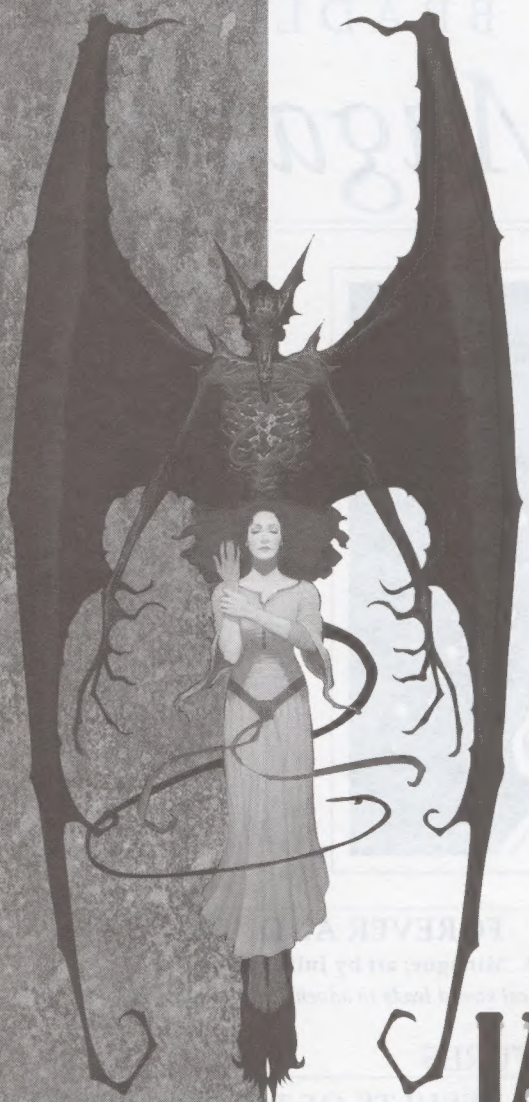

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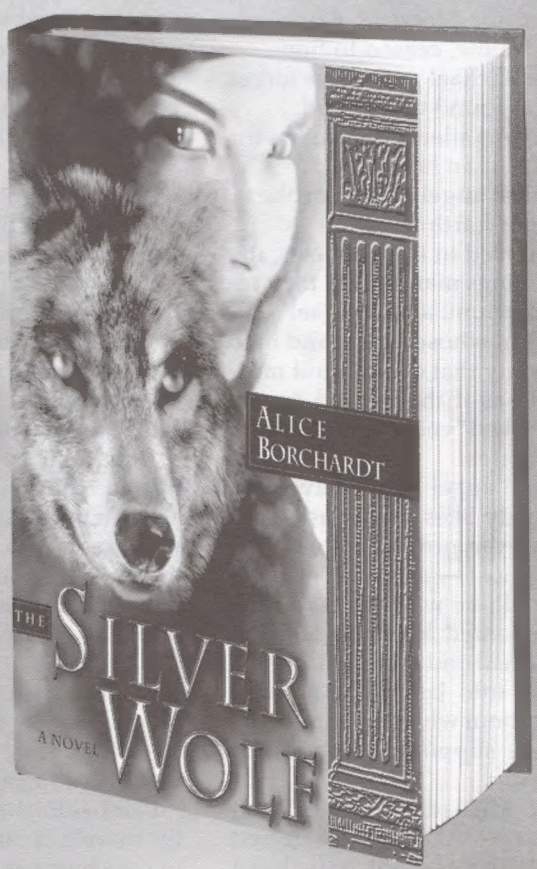

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Escape Artists

by Susan Shwartz

The golden chariots of the heavenly host simply stopped. Archangels leaned upon their swords, Thrones and Dominions stood at parade rest, and Cherubim and Seraphim paused in mid-flight. The feathers of their wings shone, but did not glitter, for glitter would have meant *motion*; and nothing moved. Even the blood of Armageddon, far, far below, ceased to flow.

Archangel Michael passed his forces in review and found them good.

And there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour.

The last rebel angel's voice broke it. "But what of Earth?"

The stars reeled in their courses; the cherubim's wings mantled till they regained equilibrium; and Michael's executive seraph, whose wings and halo framed a beauty that could blind mortals as surely as if they gazed on the naked sun, "tsked" celestially chiseled, disapproving lips.

As the rebel angel might have said himself, nobody likes a smartass. That was not, however, proper language for the heavenly host — as the rebel angel knew. After all, he wasn't a renegade like their lamented kinsman and enemy. But he had independent habits, like erupting into jam sessions with Gabriel, just about when the sons of the morning were supposed to shout for joy.

Archangel Michael grumbled that Angel Issachar — who really preferred being called Zack — not only lived down to his name in Scripture, but had two left wings during free-flight drills. At least, the warrior archangel could thank God Zack wasn't a seraph. Each of them had *six* wings.

Pointedly avoiding Zack's eyes, the heavenly hosts gazed below the circles of the moon at the massing armies. The hosts of hell crouched below.

Michael's wings flared. His massive shoulders squared under his war cloak. His hand tightened upon his terrible swift sword. Just as he was about to order Zack to shut up and soldier, or celestial words to that effect, a blast of glory compelled even the great Archangel to awed silence.

Logos flickered in the supercharged air like tongues of fire, bright almost past even an angel's power to endure.

Why not let My boy try?

The *last* time Logos had spoken that way, they'd gotten the Incarnation.

Michael inclined his mighty head. *Thy will be done.*

Zack sank to his knees, then through the clouds, down past the circle of the moon to the embattled Earth. A moment, incalculable by human standards, passed. So did the tremors caused by Zack's translation.

With a shout like thunder, Michael hurled aloft his golden banner. In this sign they would conquer, or all worlds would end. The angels' cheer shattered the crystal sphere cradling the moon. Singing praises, they stormed down onto Earth's last battlefield.

So here they were at the end of all things, Martha thought, and the end of all things was a provincial museum reeking of turpentine.

Paint-splotched dropcloths protected the marble of the exhibition hall's floor in case humans other than the art students working in a zealot's frenzy might ever visit the Butler Museum of American Art again. Canvases lay stacked against the walls by the photographs, artifacts, and books that Martha had dragged from the museum's library and gift shop for inspiration. Warring with the turpentine came the damp-sandwich smell of the tiny commissary she had set up in a supply room. Doomsday this might be, but even art students trying to make the word flesh — or oil, acrylic, or tempera — had to eat.

Not so the creature who strode up and down the room. His arms gestured in the now-electrified air as if, in this guise too, he wore wings. He gazed at the paintings on the walls, from them to the students' latest attempts, and *through* the walls and at the stairwell just in case some demon ventured in past his guards.

"We are not talking art therapy here," proclaimed the rebel angel. Like his artists, he wore smeared jeans and a deplorable T-shirt. On him, they looked like cloth-of-gold. "You are Earth's last hope. You know the world was made flesh. Now you have a chance to recreate it by your art. No paladins of heaven have a greater trust ..."

Something acrid pierced the turpentine fog. Martha, the only woman in the group, sniffed the pungent air. No wonder the smoke-detectors hadn't gone off. She couldn't find fresh batteries.

"Zack ..." she cautioned.

"Not now, for God's sake," whispered the hyperrealist in the corner. When he didn't reprimand Martha, he lectured her.

"Paint," Zack exhorted them in a voice that could turn the Royal Shakespeare Company mute with shame. "In you are the seeds not just of creativity but Creation itself. Mankind relies ... I rely ... the Lord God Himself relies upon you to recreate this goodly frame the earth, this most excellent canopy, the air, mark you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fires ..."

The smoke-stink was growing stron-

ger. A shadow spread on the walls.

"Zack?" Martha tried again, heedless of scandalized glances. The high tech artist painted away toward artistic climax.

"Yes, Martha?" Zack asked kindly.

Drawn out of his exaltation by the glares and *ssshhhes*, the angel in human guise turned to stare at her: grubby middle-ager back at school. Love handles no one had grasped since her children enlisted in the Lambs of God sagged gently beneath her old T-shirt. Memories thinned her lips. Set in among fine crowsfeet, she had an artist's eyes, if nothing else.

"The halo, Zack," she told him. A rattle of machine-gun fire followed by the whoosh of a flamethrower pierced the Museum's soundproofing. The skylights shivered a little.

"Turn the halo down, Zack." She mouthed each word over the noise. "You're singeing the walls again."

"Oh. Sorry." The supernal luster faded. Gradually, the reek of burning subsided.

Damn, why did she have to fight the urge to knock her head against the floor every time he spoke? Black hair, blue eyes in a thicket of Irish lashes, a bod like mortal sin ... God, he was gorgeous.

As Zack marched past, the artists sucked in their guts. Martha could almost hear their morning, noontime, and evening prayer: "dear God, let me look like him one day." The trouble was that, here at the end of time, "one day" might be all they had.

"Why do you even care about a little scorched paint when the world's ending?" demanded the surrealist. He was a scrawny redhead who found his need to try to square his shoulders, even

Artwork by David Cherry

while painting, in hopeless imitation of Zack, a sad cross to bear.

"We're lucky, I suppose," Martha said. "He could be quoting *Paradise Lost*, not *Hamlet*."

Zack flashed a quick smile at her.

The men blinked at its sudden brilliance. "So our mommy-tracker's done her reading. Big deal." The hyperrealist grimaced enviously at his tube of alizarine crimson.

"God only knows why. Or why she's here, at all. When you think of all the really promising young artists who'd have sold their souls to fly to Ohio for this gig ... it may not be the Met, but it's a chance," the surrealist sighed.

The high tech painter worked on in a sort of rapture. Later on, Martha knew, if she cooked, he'd eat. And saddle her with all the washing up.

Zack strode among his motley crew, his brilliance muted by the flesh he wore. He stepped over a palette laden with greens and flesh tones for a pastoral. The leaf-shadows and figures were lovely, but ...

"*Et ego in Arcadia*," Martha heard Zack muse. The skull in the meadow. Even in Arcady, death came, whether to the paint-smeared artists who flinched at the muted sounds of Apocalypse now or the armies on the plains of Megiddo.

Zack leaned over the high tech artist, studying his starscape: space craft, spiraling backdrop of galaxies, yellow sun glowing nearby, and green and blue haven, brought to a brilliant sheen by linseed oil.

"You really mean to escape, don't you?" he asked the artist, who began to stutter and explain how the ship wasn't just for him, it was really an Ark that had lots and lots of room, oh, for thousands of people and animals.

"When can you finish?" Zack asked.

"Tonight?" the boy muttered. If the Last Trump had blown in his ear, he would not have heard.

Zack moved on. An American landscape of clouds massed behind mountains, a towering waterfall, a rippled pool, and, so tiny that the casual viewer (which Zack could hardly be considered) might miss it, the figure of a man fishing. Martha had rescued the yellowed relic of nineteenth-century transcendentalism from storage, even tried to restore it with techniques she half-remembered from art school. About that time the surrealist developed walking pneumonia and needed to be nursed back to life, so of course she'd had to put it aside.

"That one worked — for one person at least," Zack told her. "See his face?"

Was that a portrait of the artist, who loved his life, his world, and his art so much that he fused all three into immortality? Surely, there was no way in hell Zack could expect them to achieve that transcendent vision for all the world — was there?

She had promised herself a month ago to ask Zack precisely that; but about then, the succubi had stormed the room where the art students kept their bedrolls. Pest control had not given her much time for painting.

Here at the Last Things, let's be honest. It hadn't given her *any*.

The succubi had sighed at Zack, who foolishly pitied them until thunder growled out and he glanced up and murmured "Sorry" past the skylight.

"Ladies," Martha had intervened, "he's taken."

They had given her a you've-gotta-be-kidding — *you*? look, but let themselves be shooed out the doors.

By the time she'd ushered them past the fighting goddesses adorning the museum's facade, Martha's paints had dried. Someone had borrowed her best palette knife. And her easel had been nudged into a corner by one of the realists, who tended to sprawl out, especially if a woman (if it were scientific fact that X chromosomes just needed less elbowroom, someone should have told her) set up shop next to him.

Up and down Zack strode, St. Michael in blue jeans, reviewing his troops. Outside, Earth burned and sloughed off more of its mortal coils, rather like the serpents that accompanied the statues outside. Zack had turned them into spitting cobras — rather scary guardians, if you asked Martha.

"What are you waiting for?" the angel demanded. He paused by Martha's empty easel and grimaced. Even that could not make him look ugly. "Judgment Day?"

Martha shrugged and gestured. *Look at everything else I have to do.* Zack opened his mouth to protest. *I am here to serve you,* he had said once. She had snorted, knowing perfectly well who got stuck serving whom.

False dawn exploded through the skylight.

"That's reveille. Sorry, I'm due on watch," Zack muttered, almost like a young man, late for work. Then he Manifested. His wings gleamed in the gallery, miraculously *through* his paint-smeared T-shirt, which transformed itself into mirror-bright armor. He grew in height and luster until the mortals in the room flinched away.

Now *that* was true magic.

One young man tossed his brushes down.

"How can I match *that*?" he said. "I'm only human. At least, if I were fighting, I'd be doing something. Not this hopelessness."

He turned and walked slowly down the stairs. They heard the door slam behind him. He had left his palette in a mess. Martha tore off the oil-stained sheet and laid it aside.

"Who am I to outlive my world?" asked a third artist, an engraver whose painstaking representations of new heaven and new earth had been going nowhere since the Great Beast manifested on city streets. "Ever wonder why anyone here was offered the chance?"

His eyes, like the others, questioned her presence. So, frankly, did she. The one time she'd dared to ask him why he'd chosen her, *You had a strong portfolio,* Zack told her.

Well, maybe once, she had. She had niggled at her work in the too-short, guilty hours she'd stolen from a husband whose needs she always failed to guess, much to his contempt, and her children, whose first ten years had been "gimme" practice. Maybe if she'd been less selfish ... but she hadn't had much

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of a self those years, except when she painted; and she wasn't supposed to paint. She hadn't been particularly surprised when her husband left: if she really didn't exist, what had he to come home for?

She hadn't painted much thereafter, not even after the Signs unfolded and her children joined the Lambs. *You had a strong portfolio.* Once.

Even at the end of time, she was keeping house: tidying up after art students who might as well have been raised in the town dump. She was still stuck being a Martha, not a Mary. And it was a Mary, an artist, Zack needed to paint the magic that would recreate Earth.

"You're a pious-eyed cheat," the rebel angel had told her. "And the one you're cheating is yourself."

She had giggled for the first time since all hell broke loose. God, it had felt good to giggle. Zack had been delighted.

The painter of starscapes opened his mouth. "I think I'm ready."

Giving his canvas one last, loving look, he scrawled his signature near a star cluster and stepped back to evaluate it. The other artists clustered at his back.

"Can't you wait for Zack?" Martha asked.

"*Now*," said the high tech painter, "or never."

He laid down his brush and stepped back from the canvas, summing it up with his eyes as if he were artist, gallery owner, critic — and recording angel, all in one. His eyes caressed the starship that gleamed from his canvas. You could almost feel its velocity as its course neared its glowing homeworld-to-be. He smiled and walked back toward his canvas and *into* it.

For a moment, they all flinched backward as the cold of deep space and the unadulterated light of the stars poured over them. Martha flung her hand over her eyes: the stars' brightness reminded her of Zack — or Lucifer. Tears poured down her face.

When they could bear the light in the gallery once again, the artist was gone. And the starship had plunged that much nearer to its rendezvous with the new home of mankind — whatever of mankind had managed to board.

Warmth blossomed behind her back, and she whirled to greet their patron.

"Zack!"

He wore the full armor of the Host of Heaven. But his halo was dimmed; his breastplate showed dents; his greaves were splashed with blood and ichor. Slowly, as if the act tired him, he changed his guise, transforming armor to T-shirt and jeans, the jeans spattered with red and green.

"I had to see," he said. "So, after the battle, I warped time back — you don't have to stare at me, some guys are in worse shape out there. *Oh my.*"

He walked up to the completed canvas, glittering with the splendor of deep heaven.

"He made it," Zack announced. "Bless him, he made it." His eyes stared at the starship as if they could count the people carried safely within its layered, gleaming decks, bound for their new world, with an artist as their pilot. "He's out there, and he's not alone."

Zack smiled. Then his eyes grew bright with tears. "But it's only a brand saved from the burning. I need a whole *world* saved, not just one space colony."

The artists, more eager than ever to please him, bent to their work.

Martha stood and watched the rebel angel. As his shoulders slumped, she dared to lay a hand on his arm.

"Do you want a cup of tea?" she asked him softly.

"I want the work only you can give me, not cups of tea. When are you going to start?"

She would have spilled blood for him, let alone paint, in that moment. But, "I'm working on it," she had to mutter.

She escaped to find the electric kettle. On her way back with it, she saw two

Artwork by David Cherry

Artwork by David Cherry

more artifacts — a glass bell and a miniature portrait of a President — and tucked them under her free arm. They joined the collection of needful things she had stashed against the wall facing her easel. She stared at them from time to time as if she could force inspiration from them, but her mind, like the wall, remained blank.

Artist after artist painted their refuges or surrendered. One evening, Martha saw that the miniaturist had left his ivory square unattended. She bent over it. There shone the palace tower he had created with strokes of a brush barely one strand thick. From one of its windows she saw the artist's trapped eyes. His delicate, precise creation had room only for himself. She sighed and laid the ivory against her wall.

The landscape artist painted a scene of Nantucket and disappeared into it one morning. Another painter had recreated the old mills that had been responsible for the museum's birth: in an eternal Steel Valley nothing like what really existed, energetic men would carried their lunch boxes to work, and robust women and laughing children waited outside the fences for them.

Now Martha wandered alone in the long galleries that held only her collections, the electric tea kettle, and, occasionally, Zack. She huddled into a coat she had unearthed from the museum's Lost and Found in the days when she did not fear to venture downstairs and waited for Zack or a workable idea.

Zack appeared first, hastily retracting his wings. His glowing armor reeked of ozone and fried dust. The limp hair tumbling down Martha's neck tried to bristle.

"The New Amalekites set off a nuke," he told her. "I helped some Thrones snuff it."

She recoiled, more afraid for him than of the radiation.

"Don't worry. This armor decontaminates itself." He paused, as if steeling himself to report bad news. "I saw Joey."

The pointillist. "He left at dusk," Martha sighed. "You know he never had much to say to me. I couldn't stop him."

"You remember the succubi? One of those girls ambushed him. She was lurking in the fountain outside, and he — he was in despair. She grabbed him before I could swoop down and save him. I heard one scream. It sure sounded happy, poor soul." Zack matched Martha's sigh — she would never get used to hearing an angel sigh. "What a way to go."

Martha turned on the electric kettle. Its burbling whistle might cheer them, and the warmth would be comforting: this close to world's end, the gallery never got quite warm.

Zack stared at the Nantucket seascape. Gray in the winter, sparkling in the summer: it was only an island, and he needed a big enough to hold all humanity. When she handed him a mug of tea, he wrapped his long artist's fingers about it and huddled over the steam.

That night he refused to leave her alone at the scene of her failure. Heaping a pile of covers tactfully at the far end of the room, he pretended to sleep. Later on, Martha heard the pad-pad-pad of his footsteps patrolling downstairs.

She wrapped a blanket about herself and ventured down the dark stairs into the lobby with its shadowed, coffered ceiling to join him. The earth shook underfoot. Not long now.

"You shouldn't be up," Zack greeted her.

"Why sleep away the time I've got left?" she asked. He shook his head and gestured for the blackout shades to spread more securely over the two-floor-high windows.

"What's it look like out there?" she asked.

"You don't want to know."

"I'm an *artist*! At least, I'm supposed to be!" Martha flared at the angel. Unlike a human, Zack didn't jump at the chance to reproach her for not doing a brushlick of work.

He gestured and a shade evaporated. Again, the earth rumbled. Outside, lava flowed in the driveway beneath the porte-cochere. It bubbled and popped in the ruined fountain, doubtless having made things too hot to handle for the succubus who had laired there. Had she escaped to rejoin the legions of hell? Why should Martha care? Still, she did. At such a moment, no one, not even a demon, should be alone. And yet, she had read, demons were always isolated within their lost souls. Well, so was she. Did that make her a demon? Sometimes she wondered if she had a soul at all, or if it had been eaten.

This had been an old town, a steel town, ugly with soot. But she remem-

bered green and gold summers and light upon the river (polluted by the mills even before Wormwood fell), and now she mourned. Could she capture those old colors in paint?

A roar made her help and jump back, almost into Zack's arms. A geyser spurted up what would have been a block away if the burnt-out city still had blocks. The live steam froze on contact with the air. She thought she could smell the reeks of sulfur and brimstone. Pale lightnings flickered.

"Contaminated," said the angel. He touched the window, which blacked obediently out again, then led her back through the lobby, past Winslow Homer's idyllic "Snap the Whip," and upstairs into the gallery.

He settled down again before the starscape. The pilot had brought his spacecraft into orbit about the green and blue world. It looked like the orbital photos of Earth they used to take in the days before all rockets delivered missiles. Now a flock of tiny craft she had not noticed in the painting before glittered between the mother ship and their new home: planetfall.

Martha lingered at the angel's now-wingless back, wondering whether to offer her usual anodyne of tea, or the good stiff drink he would have looked like he could use if he were mortal.

All the years of being student, wife, mother, and finally den mother to the artists here at the end of time, it had become her job to anticipate need and supply it, with apologies for not having done better. But Zack was not, strictly speaking, human. And his need was one she hadn't even tried to meet.

"Will you for God's sake stop hovering," Zack demanded. "Sit and talk to me." He put his hand up to rub the back of his neck. Feeling the gorget of his armor there, he shrugged it into elsewhere, standing free in jeans and T-shirt. Then he stretched, weary as if he'd toted children on each hip all day and was grateful just to sit in peace and quiet.

"Are you going to be warm enough like that?" she asked. "It's freezing in here. I was afraid to go down and try to fix the boiler." From the time she had been a child taking lessons here in pastels, the cellar had always been filled with shadows.

"I'm the one who should be sorry," Zack asked.

"Let me get you a sweater, a jacket..." She rose, her hands fluttering so ineffectively that no one would ever have believed she'd been an artist once.

"Sit *down*!" Zack ordered. "At least, I can help out in the heat department." His wings manifested and fluttered slowly, stirring up a stale current of warm air. Martha sat again, basking in the sudden comfort.

"It's not going to work," Zack muttered.

"*He's* bringing them home," Martha pointed at the shuttlecraft. "I'll get a magnifying glass so you can see how he's piloting the lead shuttle."

"I don't *need* a magnifying glass, remember? I can see the fall of every sparrow. And I can see Sean, over there, trapped in his ivory tower. It's too small for him, much less for all Earth, and what I need to rescue is all Earth."

Martha's eyes filled. The boys had worked so hard. Look at the seascape, the Western plain, the old, old pastorals. Each one of them was an artist's best work, his hope for immortality. And some had even succeeded.

"They were good, Martha," said the angel. "But their minds and hearts were just not big enough. The whole world's dying of starvation, and all they gave me was is green apples."

He sighed. Then words poured out of him in a rush. "I tried to save Earth. I had free will, just like you. I was so proud when God allowed me to try, but pride is a sin ... I can cry for pardon and God will take me back but — oh Martha!" The words poured out of him in a rush. "If I give up, what happens to you?"

Shivering, Martha rose from the protective warmth of Zack's gently beating wings.

"I don't know," she said. "I raised two kids alone."

"I've got to keep you safe."

"Give me a break!" she muttered and shoved aside the empty easels. No one here wanted the room, so she might as well use as much space as she could. She gathered up the tea kettle and placed it against the blank wall. It shrieked, and its spout let out a plume of steam that darkened the wall.

She picked up the ivory miniature in which a trapped artist must now protest for however long eternity might last and set it by the kettle. Next to the bell, the Presidential visage beneath its powdered wig, the stacks of paintings she had brought in to inspire the other artists and remind herself that beauty remained even in a dying world.

Artwork by David Cherry

"I have faith — and don't tell me what awful nerve I've got to talk of faith to an angel — that nothing good is ever lost. Like ... "

To the canvases she'd stacked against the wall, she added the victorious planetfall and the Nantucket seascape where she could now observe fishing boats emerging from the harbor and people working on the docks. Good for them. She added the steel mill: American Gothic, urban style. It annoyed her. She draped the sheet of translucent, paint-stained paper left behind by a despairing artist over it.

"Zack," she asked in a different tone altogether, "in all your battles — did you ever see my kids?"

Zack's face contorted until it was no longer beautiful. His hands came up to cover it.

A faint moan forced its way out of Martha's gut. "Like that — or didn't you look?"

He shook his head.

"You don't know? I'm just as glad. I want to believe that they're not lost to me, that I'll see them again."

She went to the neat piles of her belongings and sorted through them. From beneath her roll of blankets, she produced an incongruously genteel handbag. It disgorged a wallet from which she extracted snapshots of a boy, a girl, resplendent in the uniform of the Lambs of God. She set them on her solitary easel and stepped back to study them as if she planned to paint their portraits. In all the years, she had never painted them. They would not stand for it, much less sit still.

"You think you'll see them?" Zack asked. "I wish I had that kind of faith. I failed. I'll just go back to heaven, and Michael will tell me I fly with two left wings."

Martha shrugged. "At least your wings warm up the room. They haven't gotten you into any traffic accidents, have they?"

He laughed, a little shakily.

"I think we'll all be together soon," Martha said, staring at her children's faces. Those miniature faces on the cracked photos were more beautiful to her than Zack. "Maybe not in Heaven. Otherwise, why would you be here instead of all" — she waved a derisive hand — "hypersomatic and triumphant like John Milton on LSD?"

Zack chortled, then went serious again. "I have to get you out of here," he said. "Martha. Pick a painting. Pick someplace that you think will give you a chance at life, and I'll use all the power I can beg to send you into it. What'll it be? The stars? The Steel Valley?"

Speak the word only and my servant shall be healed, she thought. *She* was supposed to have done the healing. Her children's faces smiled down at her. Even now, even if they didn't need her, she could hardly abandon them.

She shook her head. "Sorry, Zack. I'm not going."

"You *have* to," he protested.

"Why? Seems to me you brought me here to do the rescuing, not to be rescued. Granted, I haven't done too well at the job, but if I work real hard at it ..."

"But I value you as *you*," Zack told her. "Not as a way out. Come on, Martha. For *me*. Pick."

His eyelashes fluttered almost as enticingly as those wings. She wavered. God, he was hard to refuse. No wonder the daughters of Eve fell, before the Flood.

She stamped her feet. "Not in a million years!" she snapped. "You said I could paint. You asked if I was going to wait till Judgment Day. Now, that's what it is, and I've got work to do. Get the hell out of my way!"

She turned her back on the angel and began to squeeze out paint.

He walked around in front of her and knelt. Some trick of the angels made him still able to look her eye to eye so she could see what glinted on his cheeks. "I beg you."

Dear God, was the angel *weeping*?

What a wicked, selfish bitch she was, letting him cry like that. She ought to go along. But if she did, there went Earth's last chance. *Her* last chance, which he had given her. She would be a proper, selfish artist if it were the last thing she ever did.

She tore a fresh sheet of paper off her palette and scooped a gleaming tear off the angel's cheeks. The tear kept its shape. If anything, it shone more brightly. She mixed it with blue, then with white. The volume of paint expanded, grew immense. Taking her largest brush — perhaps she could send Zack to fetch a roller, even — she applied it to the gallery wall.

In a trance, she worked until bloody dawn peeped through the skylights. Zack was long gone, no doubt shouting with the sons of the morning with a throat and heart that grew increasingly sore. She rotated her aching neck, tried to shrug the ache from stiffened shoulder muscles, then studied her work.

Blotches and blurs might have been a skyscape; some hints of green and flowing water were redeemed by the living glitter of Zack's tear. It definitely needed something.

Maybe Zack had been wrong about her and her husband right. She simply wasn't much of an artist. Or anything else.

You've just started.

She headed toward a ledge where she had set potted palms rescued from the reception rooms downstairs. They were drooping, discolored; she suspected the boys had poured turpentine into them rather than walk to the nearby sink. Still, they'd last long enough for what she had in mind. She pulled them from their ancient pots and plastered dirt and leaves against the wall. Wincing, she crashed the glass bell against a painted rock. It tolled as it died, a shockingly lovely sound. She nudged the paintings she had salvaged up against the wall, each facing out: a galaxy of choices. She sacrificed her children's pictures, letting the wet paint glue them into her collage. As an afterthought, she added her driver's license.

She no longer had a mural. What she had now was either an epic mess or a monumental collage — and still was not enough.

Think: What does the world need?

Think: What do you need?

I need *more*.

Need howled out of her like Lucifer's last dopplered scream as he fell from grace to hell. She had her memories. She had the memories of earth and man and culture. She even had tokens of the future. They weren't enough. They were barely hers. *She* was barely hers. Before Zack could stop her, she snatched up a canvas bag and a painting knife (not that she'd be likely to hit even a baby demon with it) and ran down the marble stairs. Zack would have a major fit when he found she'd left.

Too damned bad. Did he want an artist or did he want things safe? At the eleventh hour of the last day, that sounded pretty stupid.

She needed things that were hers, that she won for herself. The spitting cobras reared their hoods, but forebore to strike. The marble faces of the goddesses by which they coiled raised horrified eyebrows and their Roman noses

twitched in shock. What was she looking for? What she could find of an Earth, a town, a life she remembered. A thin lava ran in the fountain, abandoned even by the last succubus. An assembly of bones — carpals, metacarpals, and phalanges — lay on the broken base. Was that all of Joey that the succubus left?

He had such clever hands, she recalled with a lump in her throat, even if he never bothered to clean a paintbrush. With a stick and a mute apology, she knocked the bones over to where she could scoop them into her bag. *You'll still create,* she promised them. Lava clung to the stick, which smoldered. Maybe she could use it as a weapon. Right. The Hosts of Hell, and she'd charge them with a stick.

She scanned what remained of Wick Avenue. A penny on the sidewalk? A violet smeared with ash from what had been the museum's lawn? How about a book or even one of the signs from the University Administration building a block away? She'd always wanted to go back to school, but never had time or money.

Now, she would own that, too.

She pulled the neckband of her T-shirt up to protect her nose and mouth from the stinks of the dying earth. Even so, she frequently had to stop and cough. At the sight of a half-melted car and what lay inside it, she doubled over and retched.

Dashing her hand across her mouth, she looked at the ruins of her world. She remembered it as green and gold, but now it really was the wasteland people called it. With most of the buildings down, she could see across the valley of downtown, out toward the Market Street bridge. Not much remained of the mills on the riverbank below. That river had sometimes flamed in the daylight, poisoning flesh and air. Now, it ran with a thin lava. From time to time, she could see gouts of fire leap from it, rather than the long, disciplined ribbons of white-hot steel that the blast furnaces had once gushed. It might look like hell, but the people who controlled it had built a world.

Her bag grew heavy. Time to get back. If Zack returned and found her missing, it would break his heart to think his rescued artist, the one with one broken wing, had given up. Damn, why did she have to be saddled with the burden of pleasing him too? Why had he saddled her with that? Stay inside, dear. Don't take risks. Don't be that way.

Don't be.

When had she created the work Zack had said was so strong?

She hadn't.

She had been too busy bustling, too busy making sure she was unselfish. Not risking herself, since they needed her and were too important to rescue her when she screwed up. In her memory, she how they drew out the word that meant her burden: *neeeeeeed,* like cattle mooing for hay. Meet their needs. Cook a meal; run an errand; read a mind, read a story. Listen — hell, listen to ten stories, including hearts-and-flowers about how they *had* to go away and she *had* to understand. And meanwhile, the work, the precious, unique work, went unfinished for so long that she finally believed it when people told her she must not have cared enough.

Then, Zack had come. But Zack was an angel. Angels didn't need anyone, except maybe God.

Maybe she wouldn't bother going back.

You want to finish up, don't you?

Yes! Naked, selfish lust for her unfinished project struck her in the road. She shouldered her stick and ran back up the hill toward the museum, gasping in the poisoned air. Her lungs would be ruined.

So what?

After all, in all the stories, something was always went wrong with artists' lungs. It made them tragic, didn't it?

Nuts to that.

Trumpets brayed like something out of a Satanic opera. Something chitinous clicked on the slagged pavement, and a new wave of sulfur and brimstone and filth brought her to her knees. Crimson fire gushed through where her head would have been if she'd still been standing. She hurled herself to one side and found herself practically lying beneath the jaws of the Beast. *All* of its jaws.

It was the Great Beast of the Apocalypse.

Stay around long enough, she told herself, *and you'll see* anything. She had seen what artists had racked their talent and their souls to paint, and she wasn't sure she would survive the sight.

If she looked into the wicked eyes

Artwork by David Cherry

that gleamed from its crowned heads, she'd be caught worse than a bird by a cobra. She shut her eyes and brought her stick up. She jammed it where she thought one of those sets of hungry mandibles might be, rolled, and scrambled to her feet with strength she didn't know she had. Her bag banged against her shoulder, too precious to discard, and she ran for her very soul.

Eyes wide with terror, she ran. She didn't want the Beast to be the last thing she ever saw. She didn't. She didn't. She wanted to get back to the gallery. She wanted to finish her work. She wanted —

"Martha! Get out of there!"

Zack's voice screamed from the sky.

Real stupid, Zack, she thought. *Don't you see I'm running as fast as I can?*

She might as well be scampering on flypaper.

The angel dived toward her, like a fighter plane with wings, fueled by gravity, desperation, and whatever angels used for adrenaline. He snatched her up into his arms and leapt again into flight. She could feel his heart and lungs struggling to power the celestial mechanism of his frantic wings.

Another gush of fire. Zack dropped as if he'd hit wind shear. He started evasive maneuvers, dodging closer and closer to the museum doors in a reek of burnt feathers. His face was gray. Iridescent fluid gleamed on it and made his hands damp where they grasped her.

"How bad did it burn you?" she asked.

"Woman," he gasped, "are you out of your ***mind***?"

For some reason, they both laughed.

It was no bad thing, she thought, to laugh at the jaws of death. The museum's comforting walls loomed up. The statues raised swords and shields, and the cobras reared up to spit venom. The Beast took them in one gulp.

Zack thrust Martha in at the bronze doors. They clanged shut, then boomed and shook as a blast from hell struck them. The glass panes evaporated, and the bronze began to glow. The beast hurled itself against the doors. Its acrid breath gushed into the gallery

Such a dinky little museum to be Earth's last stronghold. The marble stairs began to heat as they rushed up. They would crack. The I-beams that supported the walls would buckle. The foundations would crumble. But not for a few more moments. Maybe it would be long enough.

They staggered into the gallery. Zack collapsed to his knees, his head down. Charred patches crisped his crumpled wings.

"If we prayed," Zack said, "we'd be rescued. Maybe." He flinched, as if the "maybe" hurt worse than the burns.

Martha edged from beneath his arm and damaged wings. Not wasting time — again, the Beast hurled itself against the doors, and this time the walls shook — she tumbled her bag open. She took out the bones and laid them out beneath the plants, then set the penny near those grasping fingers. *Lord, shall these bones live?*

A book lay by the water that gushed and gleamed from Zack's tear. Nearby, like the shadow of a rock in a weary land, was the bulk of a building resembling the museum, but sunlit, not battered by the Beast. She brushed her hair off her sweaty face. Singed strands came off in her hand, and she embedded them in almost-dry paint.

She spared Zack an anxious glance. He was very pale, except where he bled. His teeth chattered. She supposed that, when an angel went into shock, the wings made things worse. Her heart ached for him, but she had time only to assemble her collage with desperate, desperately sure skill. His eyes met hers. He understood.

The beast hurled itself against the doors and through them into the lobby below. Claws began to click upon the stairs. The building shook, shattering the skylight. She hunched her shoulders — safe for now!

Zack cried out. She heard him fall, saw the glowing blood from where the broken glass gashed his wings. Grabbing up a cloth for bandages or a tourniquet or whatever he needed, she staggered back to him across the heaving floor. She touched his cheek where his blood and his sweat glowed.

Another quake shook the building until its foundations groaned. In the gaping wound of the skylight, even the light of day went dark. When it returned, Zack's eyes met hers, and he bit his lip.

"Well, I tried," he mouthed.

"Let me," she muttered. "Let me, let me."

Plaster crumbled from the wall. She hunched herself over Zack, desperately careful not to brush his burns. "C'mon, fella, we're getting out of here," she murmured. "Help me."

She got her shoulder under his again and heaved, trying to get him back onto his feet or at least into a crawl. The wall on which she'd created her collage began to crack.

"We have to hurry," she told him.

He shook his head. "Not gonna work."

"It's *going* to work," she said. "Just a little farther."

Her chest ached: angels might fly, but this one was almost all dead weight. Clear fluid — ichor? — oozed from the ruined feathers of his wings. Some molted. She gathered them up, brushed them across the glowing blood and sweat that marred his face, and touched them to the wall. It shivered. Under the onslaught of the Beast, it shook again. Gently, she laid the feathers of the angel who risked his life for humankind beside the river his tears had helped to paint. The wall rippled with the water.

When she turned back to the angel, his head was up. He even managed to smile.

"I told you." Why was she sobbing? She didn't have time for tears. She smeared them off her face and onto the trembling, gleaming wall. "Nothing good is ever lost. It's all there. We have only to ... "

"I can't walk," he said. "Can't fly. My wings are gone. Can't call on ... *it's* too close!"

Stood to reason, such as it was, that an angel would have massive allergic reactions to the presence of the Beast.

"Stop whining," she forced harshness into her voice. "Your wings are burnt, not gone."

"You go. You're ready. Bless ... "

"Not without you, mister!" Martha snarled at the rebel angel. "If you can't walk or fly, I'll carry you. Better hurry. It's almost here."

The other artists had known when their work was finished. She dragged Zack over to it, signed the wall in the angel's blood, took hold of one corner, and tugged.

The wall came away as if she drew a curtain to reveal ...

... new heaven and new earth.

Oh, how it glowed.

Martha crossed over. She found herself standing in sunlight and fragrant air. Aches, burns, and filth had fallen from her. She was no younger than she had been, but more richly, more fully herself. The person she was now, she knew, would not tire or despair.

She knew it took an act of will, or

belief, to pass over. Now, she must make Zack understand.

"Well," she asked, "are you coming? So what if your wings won't work? You don't need them."

As the Beast, very sure of itself, stalked into the exhibition hall, Zack let himself topple from the old world to the new. His wings dropped from his shoulders, a burden he no longer wished or needed. He stood, no longer rebel Issachar, but Zack in his familiar work clothes, smiling his familiar, beloved smile.

And the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

Martha had always understood how the daughters of earth might look upon the sons of God and find them fair before the Flood, but not the reverse. She had never understood the Anakim. Not until now.

She suspected that she'd be a quick learner.

He wrapped his arm over her shoulder in love, not need, and they walked away from the ruined world. When they turned the corner of the building, people ran to greet them, a boy and a girl in the lead. Martha hugged them, glancing over their heads at Zack.

They would have work to do. They would have joy. Above all, they would have joy.

The Museum on New Earth houses a gallery where few people ever come because it reminds them of a time this new world has no time or need, really, to remember. An immense collage occupies one wall. Its colors never fade. As if invisible feathers clean it, it is never dusty. And the sun always shines brightly through the skylights.

❄

For the past 14 years, **Susan Shwartz** has been a financial writer and editor at various Wall Street firms. For the past 20 years, she has written, edited, and reviewed fantasy and science fiction. Her most recent books are **SHARDS OF EMPIRE**, **CROSS AND CRESCENT**, and **VULCAN'S FORGE** (with Josepha Sherman).Her other books include **THE GRAIL OF HEARTS**, and, with Andre Norton, **IMPERIAL LADY** and **EMPIRE OF THE EAGLE**. Her anthologies include the two volumes of **SISTERS IN FANTASY** (Roc) and two volumes of **ARABESQUES** (Avon). She has published more than 60 pieces of short fiction and has been nominated for the Nebula five times, the Hugo twice, and the World Fantasy Award and the Edgar once each. She has a PhD in English from Harvard University, enjoys writing polemical letters to major newspapers, and spends entirely too much time on the Nets. She lives in Forest Hills, New York, with a computer, lots of books, and a notorious shoe collection.

David A. Cherry and his family (a wife and two daughters) live in Oklahoma. He is a former president of ASFA and, before that, he used to be a lawyer, but he says he'd rather dig ditches than go back to practicing law. For someone with as much artistic talent as David has, this seems an unlikely risk.

Artwork by David Cherry

THE HOUSE IN THE HOLLOW

by Helen Kenyon

Dusk was deepening. Shadows poured down from the hill behind the house to gather in the yard. The small stone barn looked insubstantial, its outline blurring in the twilight, merging with the huge dark mass of the oak trees which sheltered the cottage from the storms that came roaring up from the sea in winter.

Rosie let the curtain fall back and looked around the kitchen. She felt a warm glow of satisfaction now all the hard work of the renovation and redecoration was complete.

On the kitchen table lay the remains of her supper: the empty plate with lambchop bones and knife and fork placed neatly on one side, the bottle of wine, the half empty glass, the Siamese cat ....

"Oh, Saffy," Rosie squealed. "No! You'll make a terrible mess!" The cry came too late. Leaving drips of gravy right across the table and the yellow-brown tiled floor, Sapphire fled with a bone, hid under the chair in the corner, and began to crunch contentedly.

Mopping her way across the kitchen from drip to drip, Rosie spotted the suitcase. She paused, damp soapy cloth in hand, and stared at it without recognition. Which of the many people who had traipsed through the cottage that day had left it?

Rosie got stiffly to her feet and dropped the cloth back onto the sink. She tried to pick up the suitcase and for a moment thought it had been nailed to the floor. Putting more effort into it, she hoisted the case onto the table. The catches were stiff with rust, but after a struggle they sprang open. Inside were three books and — no wonder the case was so heavy — a large flat oval metal thing with a round handle on one end. Rosie wrestled it out of the case and set it down on the table.

She remembered now who had mentioned the suitcase. It had been the builder. The van with her furniture had just arrived and she had been too flustered to take it in at the time, but now it all came back to her. He had found the suitcase up in the attic while he was working on the roof.

She studied the metal object. She had never seen anything like it before. She could not put a name to it. Puzzled, she opened one of the smaller books. The typeface was old, and on the flyleaf she saw the date 1907, but she could understand no more; the book was in Welsh. So was the next book. The third, slightly larger than the others and bound in red, was equally frustrating but as Rosie flicked through the pages, a piece of paper fell out.

She unfolded it carefully and saw neat copperplate handwriting on paper yellowing with age. And with a leap of delight, she realised she could at least read this.

Old Bethan Elias, aged 90 and clear in mind though rather frail in body, told me this story about Tyn Y Twll.

Tyn Y Twll ... Rosie knew that much Welsh. It was the name of her house, the House in the Hollow. This was a story about her house! She looked at the page where the paper had been. This looked like a translation from part of the book.

Artwork by Lori Deitrick

On baking day, after the woman of the house had made enough loaves for the week, and while she was waiting for the bread to finish baking in the oven, she would always place the old gradell over the hob and make a batch of lightcakes or pancakes ready for the men coming in from work. In the evening, before retiring to bed, she would hang the gradell on the large nail in the porch. Mrs Elias told me that the fairies were in the habit of borrowing the gradell for their own baking, as they had no iron, and always repaid the loan with a few of their own cakes which, she told me, were particularly sweet and delicious.

Rosie was delighted. A real fairy story about her new home! But what on earth was a gradell? She read the story again. Something made of iron that you baked small cakes on ...

Then she realised exactly what the heavy oval object was. Gradell was Welsh for griddle, or girdle or skillet. The basic idea of baking on a flat stone or piece of iron over a fire must go back to the dawn of cookery and so the utensil had acquired many names in many different cultures.

An iron bakestone. And this one had been regularly used by fairies.

Elated by the successful move into her new home, fired by the wine, Rosie picked up the gradell and waltzed over to the front door. The soft damp night air met her as she stepped out over the threshold. Wind sighed in the oak leaves and across the field an owl hooted. Safe in a pocket of bright electric light, Rosie examined the walls of the porch. There was indeed a nail: a huge handmade one, about half an inch square, covered in so many coats of paint that it almost looked like a short stubby branch sticking out of the wooden porch wall. Rosie hung the gradell on the nail and stepped back to admire it. Yes, she would leave it there. And then when people asked what it was, she could tell them the fairy story about her cottage. She twirled back into the kitchen, closed and locked the door and, putting out the lights, she danced up to bed.

Next morning Saffy woke Rosie by trampling round and round on the pillow, purring into her ear and butting her face gently with a small furry forehead. Rosie pulled on soft jogging trousers and a loose sweatshirt, and fumbled her way downstairs. She opened the door and stood blinking in the bright sunshine, breathing in the cool smell of damp vegetation. The slate roof of the barn, silver with overnight rain, steamed gently in the sun. Saffy wove persistently around her ankles, silently demanding food. Rose stood for a moment, savoring the freshness of the new morning, a novelty to someone who had always lived in a city. And then she realized something was wrong. The gradell was gone.

Rosie stared at the thick black nail. "Oh no," she muttered. "Someone's nicked it!" It was not particularly the loss of the gradell that annoyed her, but the fact that someone had been here, either late last night or very early this morning. She had fallen for the myth that the countryside was still free from crime, that people could go out leaving their houses unlocked and return to find everything as they had left it. The brightness of the new day suddenly seemed slightly tarnished as she went back inside to feed Saffy.

Rosie had been out for most of the day exploring some of the bays along the coast and had finished up in the little town to buy provisions. Clutching a sagging cardboard box full of groceries, fumbling for the key in her pocket, she suddenly saw, right in front of her nose, the gradell. It was back on its nail. Rosie blinked at it, bewildered. Struggling the door open at last, she dumped the box on the kitchen table and came back out to the porch.

Black and solid, hanging from the nail as though it had been there forever, the gradell seemed to stare back. Below it, on the wooden bench, was something folded in a white cloth. Cautiously Rosie twitched back a corner to reveal seven small cakes. She glanced over her shoulder suspiciously. Come on! There were no fairies. Certainly not now, even if they had existed in the past. Someone — probably one of the neighbors — must know that old story about the gradell and was now playing a joke on her.

There was no sign of any movement, no sign of anyone watching. With a shrug, Rosie picked up the cakes and went back inside. They looked and smelt rather good and she was dying for a cup of tea.

Time slipped by smoothly at the cottage. Soon Rosie had settled into a routine. When she had sold her home in

Artwork by Lori Deitrick

Artwork by Lori Deitrick

the city and moved to Wales, her plan had been to turn her hobby into a means of earning a living. It was beginning to work. Her woven hangings and embroideries were selling. So, after feeding her animals — she was now the proud owner of two nannygoats and half a dozen hens in addition to Sapphire the Siamese — she worked on her latest project for a while until the postman arrived. As Tyn Y Twll was the last house up the lane, several miles from town, he never reached her until almost lunchtime. Later, she usually walked down to the sea or up onto the mountain pasture above her house. Most afternoons she drove down into town to buy food or to post letters. Every Friday she put the gradell on the nail in the porch. Every week it vanished, only to reappear next morning with a small offering of cakes.

Rosie was both amused and mystified. She had still not discovered who took it. If it was one of the neighbors, they were very persistent. The gradell had been borrowed every week right through the summer. Even now, when most days the clouds touched the hilltops, heavy with rain, and the leaves turned to sodden yellow-brown mounds at the sides of the lanes, the gradell still disappeared each Friday night and returned each Saturday, along with the gift of honeycakes. A very determined and dedicated prankster indeed.

Rosie had tried waiting up with the porch light left on, chair drawn over to the door, ears pricked for any sound. No one came while she watched, but even on nights when she finally went to bed to the sound of heavy rain drumming on the roof of her loft bedroom, the gradell disappeared in the small hours of the morning. Once during her vigil, she nodded off for no more than ten minutes and on looking out into the driving rain, found the gradell gone. She had tried dropping subtle hints to neighbors, but either no one knew the story of Tyn Y Twll or they were not admitting it. Strangest of all, when in desperation she began to ask openly if anyone knew any fairy stories connected with her home and even mentioned the gradell, no one suddenly broke into a broad grin and cried, "Fooled you!"

One afternoon the excited barking of a dog brought Rosie from her work on a woven wall-hanging which she was creating for an exhibition. It had been misty that morning; the opaque curling whiteness had crept in from the sea in the night, hiding the trees and striking cold and damp into her lungs as she did her morning chores. But the late-autumn sunshine still had strength to burn through the sea fog and now as Rosie put her head out of the porch, she saw Sapphire basking in her favourite spot on the sun-warmed slate of the goat-shed roof.

A black and white sheepdog puppy barked his frustration as Saffy, knowing that she was secure, regarded him lazily through slit eyes. The cat stretched provocatively, well out of reach of even the most agile dog.

Rosie was just wondering who had lost the dog when Gwennie Jones from the farm up the lane, middle-aged, wearing sensible tweed skirt, woollen jumper, and wellies, hurried in through the gate. She called the pup to heel and he came obediently, though reluctantly.

"Good afternoon," Rosie called in Welsh. After the long idle summer spent adjusting to her new way of life, she had decided she must learn the language if she was ever going to fit in properly. So, as the days had begun to shorten, she had enrolled for Welsh evening classes. Gwennie was one of the few locals who was prepared to spend the time to let her practice.

They discussed the weather and Rosie said suitably admiring things about the pup. Finally, Gwennie handed over the parish magazine, the real reason for her visit, but not before they had chatted for considerably longer than Rosie really wanted. When Gwennie finally took her leave and left, the dog trailing at her heels, Rosie hurtled into the house, grabbed her bag, coat and keys and overdue library books, and shot back out to the car, hoping that she would make it into town before the library closed and her fines grew even bigger.

It was grey dusk when Rosie swung the car back into the yard. The headlights danced across the stone wall of the cottage, glittered for a moment on the windowpanes, then died as Rosie switched off the lights and engine. She opened the car door and climbed out, only to duck back in again to retrieve her handbag and pile of new library books. Emerging backwards, trying to manage the books and at the same time fumble in her pocket for her door key, Rosie suddenly realized she was being

watched. A slender pale-faced girl stood staring at her solemnly.

Rosie straightened. "Oh ... Hello."

The girl said nothing, but still looked at her, rather accusingly, Rosie thought. "I — er ... Can I help you?"

The child still did not speak.

"Did you want something?" Rosie was becoming flustered by the lack of response. Surely the child understood English. She knew many families spoke nothing but Welsh at home, but the girl would have learned English at school. She looked about ten years old so she must be at school.

The child wore a long green dress, the skirt reaching to mid-calf, and her shoes had a distinctly home-made look. A hippie traveller child? Rosie was beginning to feel at a loss. "Be' wyt ti eisiau?" she asked again in Welsh, in what she hoped was a bright and encouraging tone of voice.

Still the child showed no sign of understanding, though her forehead creased slightly, as though this time she was trying. Finally she moved over to the porch and pointed to the empty nail.

Rosie's hand flew to her mouth in sudden embarrassment as she realised she had rushed out to town in such a hurry that she had forgotten to put out the gradell.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry." Burbling excuses, even though she was sure the girl did not understand, Rosie fumbled the door open and turned on the electric light. She heard a faint gasp of astonishment and turned to see the girl staring around the kitchen, apparently awestruck.

Rosie dumped books and bag on the table and, taking the gradell, offered it to the girl. "What's your name?" she asked, trying to make friends. "Where do you live?"

There was only an uncomprehending look for an answer. Then the girl took the gradell with a faint smile that Rosie took to be gratitude and skipped out of the kitchen.

Rosie put her head out of the door. A whisk of a shadow disappearing round the tree and through the gate told Rosie which way the girl had gone. Feeling more than a little silly, Rosie followed.

Ten minutes later she had lost her.

Rosie had thought that she knew the surrounding woods and fields well. During the fine summer days she had explored the area around her cottage, and retrieving escaped goats and searching for Sapphy when the Siamese decided to go hunting rather than come in for the night had taken Rosie into corners of the nearby countryside she would never normally have found. But she had still lost the girl and, even more worrying, she had vanished while in plain sight.

One minute she had been there, a slender shadow in the strengthening moonlight, clear in the middle of a field, and the next moment she had gone.

Rosie stared around hopelessly. There were no trees and there was not even any long grass where the girl could have hidden. There was only a smooth dark turf-covered mound of rock and earth in the center of the field.

The moonlight dimmed slowly as a cloud drifted across the sky. Rosie felt a trickle of cold sweat between her shoulder blades. A gust of wind from the sea brought a spatter of rain, promising more to come, and close by on her right an owl began to call: "Kee-wick, kee-wick." It was answered by a distant hoot.

Rosie suddenly felt like an intruder, unwanted and watched. Hurriedly she turned and set off back to the cottage, resisting — but only with an effort — the desire to run as fast as she could.

Next morning when she got up and looked outside, the gradell was back on the iron nail in the porch and the honey cakes were on the bench.

Time passed. Autumn hardened into a wet, wild winter. Though usually she was happier living alone, there were times when Rosie would have been glad of company, when the wind gusted around the cottage in the darkness and brought leaves fluttering against the windowpane. Sometimes she could have sworn she heard someone moving around the yard, but most of the time she managed to convince herself that it was only the wind.

One thing had changed. Rosie now sometimes saw the people who came to collect the gradell. Usually it was the girl, and though she now smiled timidly, she still would not — or could not — speak. Sometimes it was an older woman, and she would exchange a little halting Welsh with Rosie.

The bad weather kept her indoors a good deal and so Rosie read all she could find in the library and the local bookshop about fairies and other legends. And shut away in her cottage, sometimes alone for several days at a time, she even began to understand how people living long ago had believed them.

Finally spring came and Rosie could put the goats out to graze once more. The book said that goats were perfectly hardy and could withstand rain, but the goats had not read

Artwork by Lori Deitrick

the book. They bleated pathetically at the first drops, demanding to be put back in the cosy goat shed. Rosie had soon tired of rushing out into all weathers to rescue them, and so they had mostly stayed inside while she had pandered to their every need. They had become like two elderly spinsters demanding room service in the best of hotels.

The bright greens of spring and the soft new leaves bursting into pale sunshine put an end to such indulgence, and the promise of fresh foliage to eat even persuaded the goats to put up with a little dampness.

And so today when she was returning from her shopping, it was the goats that gave her the first warning that something was seriously wrong.

She rounded a bend in the lane about half a mile from home and had to step hard on the brakes as she found both goats in the road. The white Saanen was looking rather lost and confused, but the brown-and-white Toggenburg — always one to put her stomach before anything else — was standing on her hind legs, wiffling tender leaves from the hedge into her mouth.

Cursing and muttering under her breath, Rosie squeezed the car into a gateway so she would not block the road and leapt out to catch her runaways. They came willingly enough, and, with a hand on each goat's collar, she marched them firmly back up the lane to her yard, all the time going over and over how they could possibly have escaped. "I know I shut the gate properly," she muttered to Blodwen, the white goat, "At least I think I did ... So how did you get out?"

As she turned the goats in through her gate, she stopped, appalled. She felt as though someone had just hit her in the stomach and though her eyes saw the mess in the yard, it took some moments for her brain to catch up. Splashed across the barn wall in lurid red paint were the words, "English Out — Wales is not for Sale." "Houses for local people" in both Welsh and English was daubed on her cottage. The rubbish bin had been tipped over and the contents spread over the paving stones. Her hens scratched about amongst the food scraps; the wind blew papers around. The gate to the goats' paddock stood open.

After a long frozen moment of horror, anger kicked in. "How dare anyone!" Rosie yelled, and the goats jumped, startled but not afraid. Then she swung into action. With the goats back where they were supposed to be, she went straight into the house. Everything there was all right. No one had broken in. Relieved, she dialled the number of the police station and explained what had happened. After that she phoned Gwennie, to let her know what had happened and to find out whether they had seen anything suspicious. Then the reaction hit her and she began to shake, partly anger, partly fear. Someone had been here, messing around with her things, damaging her property.

The police were not much help. When the two officers finally arrived, they noted the damage and took statements from both Rosie and Gwennie, who had insisted on coming down to offer moral support. Vague promises were made to look into the matter, but Rosie put more faith in Gwennie's promise that her husband and sons would take particular care to watch the house and yard as they passed up and down the lane. If they caught anyone lurking, they would see them off.

It was only the next day that Rosie saw the irony in her being a target for protesters. She actually had a lot of sympathy with their cause. Wages in

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the area were well below the national average; unemployment was high and many jobs were seasonal. The area relied heavily on summer tourists and profits were so slender that a wet summer could put someone out of business. But Tyn Y Twll had been a ruin for more than thirty years before she had bought it and begun restoring it. No one had wanted a little cottage miles from town with no facilities and a distinctly idiosyncratic plumbing and sewage system. Local families wanted new houses with easy access to shops and schools.

Rosie had done much of the restoration herself, only getting professionals in to do the work that was physically or technically beyond her. Gradually she had turned the house from a cold dank ruin to a comfortable home.

Tyn Y Twll had never been a holiday home where people came only for weekends and school holidays, their cars stuffed with supplies from the city, purchased before setting off because it was cheaper than buying locally. The house had never been left empty in term-time, a dead and silent gap in the living village. Rosie was becoming involved in local life; she prided herself on her growing ability to speak Welsh. "And my great-great-grandfather came from Wales originally," she muttered under her breath as she scrubbed at the painted stone, trying to remove the words from the barn. "Before he went to England to be a coal-miner. I couldn't help where I was born. I don't remember anyone asking me what nationality I wanted." Then finally reaction overcame her and she burst into tears.

Time slipped by. Days stretched into weeks and there was no hint of another attack. Normal routine finally lulled Rosie into feeling secure again. Perhaps the attack had been a mistake. Now they knew it wasn't a holiday home, perhaps they would leave her alone.

She was sitting quietly at her work one afternoon, when a soft tapping at the window made her look up. She saw the small face of the silent girl looking in. As soon as the girl saw she had Rosie's attention, she started waving frantically. Puzzled, Rosie put the fabric, silks, and needle to one side and stood up, meaning to go to the back door to find out what the girl wanted. It was not Friday. It was not time to put out the gradell.

As she moved away from her worktable, she glanced out of the other window which overlooked the yard and saw the three men. Rosie froze in horror. They wore black balaclavas covering their faces. Two carried what looked like petrol cans and the third had a heavy crowbar in his hands. They were advancing on the front door. Fear held her motionless. They intended to burn the cottage. But surely they knew she was in here? And then, with another surge of horror, Rosie realized that they didn't. She had left the car at the garage in town to be serviced and had begged a lift back with Gwennie. If someone had watched her drive away, they might not have noticed her return. The absence of the car would make them think she was still out.

Rosie flew to the front door and flung it open. As she rushed out of the porch, the three men stopped, startled, obviously surprised to see her. "What on earth do you think you're doing?" Rosie demanded, hoping her voice sounded firmer and more in control than she felt.

"Get away from the house," one growled. "We don't want your type here. Take your money back over the border where you belong. You think you can come in here buying anything you fancy."

"I'll have you know no one wanted this cottage ..." Rosie began when another voice, cut in, speaking slow and careful Welsh.

"Keep away from her or you'll answer to us."

All heads swivelled as one to see who had spoken. The silent girl had come running around the corner but had stopped safely on the far side of the yard, poised like a bird, ready to

take flight if anyone tried to come near. But it was the man who held everyone's attention, in particular the bent bow in his hand with the arrow aimed straight for the man who held the crowbar. He was small, no more than five feet six inches tall, but he was lithe and moved like a cat as he stepped away from the goat-shed wall, the better to keep an eye on the would-be arsonists.

A slight movement at the edge of her vision made Rosie look around and she realized there were three others, all with bows and all with short swords at their sides. Their clothes, plain shirts, jerkins, and simple trousers, had the same homespun, hand-sewn look that the silent girl's had.

The man who had spoken called something to the others in a language Rosie had never heard before. The other three fanned out, keeping the hooded men targetted. Then in Welsh he said, "You will put down those things and leave here. And if you value your lives you will never return. We will always be watching. Rosie is our friend. She remembered the old ways when you and your people forgot. Wherever she was born it does not matter, she belongs here now."

The man with the crowbar suddenly leapt forwards. There was a loud thunk and Rosie saw a feathered arrow embed itself deep in the wood of the window box.

"Come one step nearer and the next arrow will pierce your heart," the leader of the fair folk snapped. The hooded man stopped and carefully laid the crowbar on the ground. He looked as though he had not taken the threat of the bows and arrows seriously before, but now he did.

The others, moving just as carefully, anxious not to provoke the fair folk to shoot again, set down the petrol cans and backed away.

"Now go!"

The men went. They moved cautiously until they reached the gate, then their nerve broke and they ran. Rosie heard the slam of car doors, an engine sprang into life and then with a squeal of tires they made their getaway back down the lane towards the town.

The fair folk relaxed and the girl came running to their leader and threw her arms around his waist. She was speaking rapidly and smiled first at him, then at Rosie. "My daughter," he said with a grin. "She was the first to see the gradell back on the nail in the porch after many many years. Fionn really believed the old stories, about the time when humans still recognized the Fair Folk, though we teased her about it. We kept telling her that they were just legends and had probably never really happened. We have a story, you see, that the people who lived in this house had always been friendly towards us and would lend us the gradell for our baking day. We always repaid the loan with some of the cakes we made." Suddenly he stopped and raised his head like an animal scenting the wind. In fact he must have heard something for he called out to his men in his own language and they quickly melted away behind the barn and vanished up into the wood. "The farmer is coming," he said to Rosie. "But do not be afraid. We *will* watch over you. My people came to this land hundreds of generations ago. We were here before the Celts and before the Romans and before the Saxons. You are *all* newcomers to us. We only care about those who remember us and the old ways. Farewell. I'm sure we will meet again." He took the girl by the hand and together they walked away into the trees.

Rosie could hear the Land Rover coming down the hill now and a few moments later it stopped in her gateway. Elwyn, Gwennie's husband, climbed out carrying his shotgun. His two sheepdogs bounded out after him, then came to heel and followed as he strode into the yard.

"Where are the bastards?" he growled, glancing round at the petrol cans and the crowbar. "I was out shooting crows in the fields above your land and I saw the three of them creeping in here."

"They ran off," Rosie said. "They — er ..." Inspiration dawned. "They must have heard you coming."

Elwyn nodded gravely. "Cowards. Men like that are always cowards. They'll try to frighten a woman living alone, but won't face a man."

Later — much later — after Elwyn had taken her down into town to give another statement to the police, Rosie stood alone outside her cottage. Once she was sure Elwyn had gone, she went to the window box, and with some difficulty, pulled the arrow from the wood. The metal head was wickedly sharp. She turned it in her hands and it caught the sun, gleaming bright yellow. Bronze, she thought. Fairies have no iron. That's why they borrow the gradell. She turned and scanned the trees and surrounding hills. She could see nothing, no movement, yet she was sure that the fair folk would keep their promise.

Rosie opened the door and Sapphy jumped down from the chair where she had been sleeping and came to rub around her ankles, welcoming her home.

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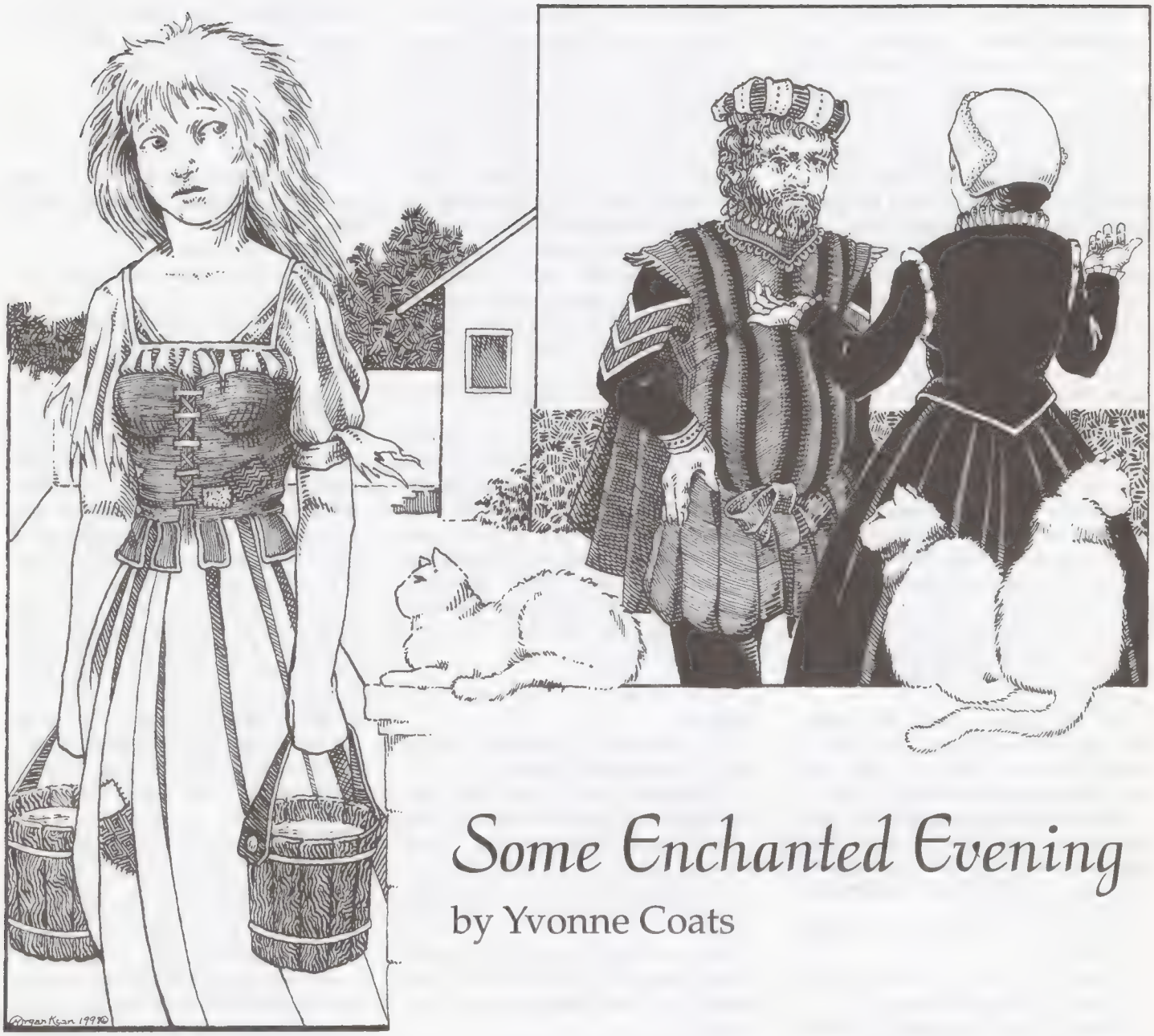
Artwork by Lori Deitrick

Helen Kenyon writes: "I grew up in Manchester, England, in an area that we would now call the 'inner city' and for as long as I can remember, I always wanted to live in the country, to keep a horse and to write. I achieved the first two ambitions as soon as I became an adult. The third one is still ongoing as getting married, having children, and earning a living got in the way somewhat. I have also spent the last 7 years extending my education by doing a degree with the Open University. But all the time, whatever else I was doing, I have always been writing. This will be my second professional sale. I have completed one novel (looking for a publisher) and am currently working on two others. To make a living in the meanwhile, I teach adults how to use computers, which is actually great fun."

Lori Deitrick has been published in *Aboriginal Science Fiction* and *Amazing Stories*, and has won the Cauldron on many occasions for her work in these pages. Her fantasy originals have won numerous awards and grace the walls in the homes of many collectors. She is also known for her sensitive portraiture and wildlife work. She shares a studio in Knoxville, Tennessee, with artist husband David Deitrick and three children.



Some Enchanted Evening

by Yvonne Coats

"She grows too beautiful," my father said to his new wife. As I grew older, he said it more often. From the tone of his voice I knew I wasn't supposed to hear him, and perhaps when I was little I didn't, but by the time I was twelve my hearing was so acute I always knew who was in the house and exactly where. I gauged moods by the sounds people made. I often heard strangers approach the house before the yard dogs, who didn't like me.

"She grows too beautiful," my father repeated, tones of frustration and despair in his voice.

"I have done as you wished," my stepmother replied. "I gave her all the hardest chores, she wears only cast-off clothing, and she rarely bathes. Her body should break on the round of work I have imposed on her." She paused for a moment, "But she thrives."

"We must think of something else," my father said, and my stepmother sighed.

Father didn't always hate me. When I was little he called me his "golden girl", his "little yellow cat". But as I grew older, he talked to me less and watched me more. One day he announced that he wouldn't see me grow up wild; he said we would move into town and live like human beings. So I lived like a human being: scrubbing floors, scouring flagstones, planting vegetables and weeding and harvesting them, washing clothes, cutting wood and laying fires. We didn't have servants because I did everything.

Until last spring I slept in the barn with the animals in the soft, sweet straw, but after that I slept in the house, on the kitchen floor near the hearth. If Father found me outside after dark, he beat me. I don't understand why everything I did was wrong. Father said he would treat me like a lady when I learned to behave properly. I didn't think proper ladies ever had to sleep on the floor, even if they were wicked, but I was afraid to say that to him.

I never spoke to — and seldom saw — anyone other than my father, my stepmother, and my twin stepsisters,

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

Clara and Doreen. I don't believe my stepmother hated me because I saw sadness in her eyes when she looked at me. Sometimes when we were alone she let me sit at her feet, and she combed and stroked my mane of hair before putting it back in its tight braid. My stepsisters *did* hate me, when they noticed me at all. Ragged and dirty as I was, I made them jealous. They coveted my hair, my skin, my shape, and especially my eyes, green as new ivy.

For over a month, Clara and Doreen talked about going to their first town dance, now that they were sixteen. I was sixteen, too, but I knew there would be no town dances for me. Dressmakers, cobblers, and milliners came to wait upon Clara and Doreen. My father sent me to the barn or the cellar whenever they came. Later, I sneaked in to examine the finery: pale rose velvet for Clara, to set off her dark hair and eyes; deep blue satin with cream lace for Doreen, to emphasize her delicate pallor; light slippers made of cloth, not leather, too precious to be worn out of doors; strange, airy confections of lace, pearls, and feathers meant to be worn as masks.

I'm not certain I envied my stepsisters their new gowns, but when I stroked the velvet or satin, their cool smoothness made me ache a little.

I heard Father coming, the keys dancing in his pocket. My stepmother looked sad, but she didn't do anything, and my stepsisters didn't care, unless they were forced to wait.

"Come on, girl, time for you to go down cellar."

"Father, you don't need to lock me up; I'm not going to run away."

He looked sad for a moment, then his eyes grew cold. "It's better this way."

"How is it better, Father? For whom is it better?"

"For everyone," he replied, and his knuckles went white as he clutched the keys. "Go on, girl, don't make me force you."

I lowered my eyes and descended the narrow stairs, holding the lantern high ahead of me. My stepmother had put cushions on the floor, the blanket from her bed folded carefully next to them. Bread, cheese, cold meat, a small pitcher of — water? No, my nose said it was ale.

"Well, it looks as if you'll be comfortable enough," Father said, going back up the stairs. At the top, not turning, he said, "We won't be late."

I listened to them leaving the house: my father's boots loud on the floor; my stepmother's heels clicking brittlely after him; a clump and a thump from Clara and Doreen — they must have been carrying their new slippers. When the house grew silent and I could no longer hear the carriage wheels, I knew I was alone. I started to cry but stopped when I heard something upstairs. The wood overhead creaked, but I didn't hear footfalls. There was a scratching noise, metal on metal, and the pop of the door bolt. The cellar door creaked open, and a voice I'd never heard before called my name.

"Lura?" the voice repeated, gruff but not unfriendly. "Come up, girl."

Puzzled but not afraid, I bounded up the stairs, then froze when I saw the woman. Like me, she was small and ragged, but she was old, with wild, gray hair. Her skin was so brown she looked painted, and she was wrinkled everywhere I could see. Her eyes were green, like mine, and she smiled at me with strong, white teeth, suddenly looking much younger.

"Who are you?"

"You might say I'm your godmother."

"I don't have a godmother; Father says I was never baptized."

"Well, then, I would have been your godmother, if your mother hadn't died. When she was gone, your father wouldn't let me see you anymore."

I thought about this for a while, then asked why she had come to see me now.

"Oh, I've been trying to see you for quite a while, but it's hard to find you alone. Your father keeps a close watch on you."

"Why didn't you just ask to see me?"

"I didn't think your father would let me. If I had asked and he'd turned me away, he would have been on guard and I might never have gotten to talk to you." She reached forward to pat my arm, but I flinched away.

"Ah, he beats you, does he?" I nodded, embarrassed but not willing to lie. "He used to beat your mother, too, trying to change her, but beating can't change what a person is."

"Trying to change what ... godmother?" I stumbled over the word, not knowing her name, and she smiled at me, then gave a short, sharp laugh, a little bark.

"'Godmother'. I like the sound of that." She shook her head. "Trying to change nature, girl; men like him are always trying to change nature. I've come to help you."

"Help me? How?"

"As I am able."

"Could you help me get to the dance?"

"Dance?" she mused. "Yes, I suppose a dance would do as well as anything."

"As well as what?"

"Never mind, never mind. Let's get you ready."

We walked out into the yard, and I noticed the dogs watched my godmother closely but stayed away. When we reached the fence at the edge of the garden, she leapt over it lightly, a four-foot jump straight up, with no apparent effort. She waited for me to clamber after her, grinning, hands on her hips. It was the first time I had left the yard since the day my father brought us all there, but I wasn't frightened. I didn't even ask where we were going.

When we found a stream, she said, "Get out of those rags, girl, and clean yourself." I expected the water to be cold, and it was, but it refreshed me. Happy to be clean all over, I didn't attend to what my godmother was doing but noted vaguely that she pulled leaves from the sycamores while humming a gentle tune which faded in and out.

When I reluctantly left the water, she waved one hand, murmured an unintelligible phrase, and I was dry and warm. She held up a gown and mask of leaves, and I put them on. When I glanced down at myself, I saw a gown of glowing green silk, woven in a pattern that resembled sycamore leaves.

"It's a glamour, girl, a good one. I cast it well, but it will fade throughout the evening. By dawn, everyone will see you're wearing nothing but leaves, and they'll be dry enough then to fall right off. Remember that!" I nodded, my eyes wide, and she again barked her abrupt laugh. "I didn't *change* the leaves, Lura; I just put an illusion on them for a little while. You'll have to wear your old shoes," she added, holding out lace slippers. "I can't make leaves last when you walk on them, so I just put an illusion on these."

"Godmother, are you a witch?" I asked her softly, not wanting to anger anyone so powerful.

"Of course not. There are no witches, so I'm not one and neither was your mother. And neither are you."

"But I'm not a 'proper' lady, either, am I?"

"Your stepsisters are proper ladies; would you want to be like them?" She made an ugly noise in her throat, like she was going to spit, "They're half-dead, all those proper ladies, young and old. Be glad you can never be like them."

"I will be tonight, though, won't I?" She smiled gently at me, and I thought she looked a little sad. She patted my arm, and I didn't pull away.

"Go to your dance, Lura. Take your stepmother's horse and saddle" — she held up one hand to stop my protest — "No one will recognize it. No one will recognize you."

"More glamour?"

"Another glamour," she agreed, and I left her by the water's edge and hurried to the dance.

The glimpses I had caught over the years of neighbors and tradesmen, gypsies and peddlers, the rare visits of my stepmother's family, did not prepare me for the tremendous number of people at the dance. I had overheard my father tell Clara and Doreen there would be nobles at the dance, and I tried to pick the aristocrats out by their bearing and the deference shown to them.

I hoped I'd be asked to dance but tried not to hope too much. I told myself that just watching the dance, listening to music made by more than one person, would be enough. Several people stared as I made my way across the room, searching for some isolated place so I wouldn't have to speak to anyone right away.

A tall man approached me and put out his white-gloved hand. "Excuse me, miss, might I speak to you for a moment?" His voice was young, light, and full of melody, as if he sang to me. "I would very much like to dance with you, though you may find me a little slow, and clumsy." I noted that he leaned slightly on a cane and glanced up to see if he was older than he sounded, and I looked into a raven's sparkling eyes. He wore a mask of black feathers, with a few white ones woven in to leaven the effect. At his temples, the feathers of the mask blended perfectly with his own black hair. The skin of his lower face was white as powder, and his lips were full and rich with blood.

He smiled gently, not showing his

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

teeth, and a tinge of color showed just below his mask. He waited quietly, and I realized he expected me to speak. "I'm certain I would not find you slow or clumsy, since I am not an accomplished dancer myself."

"So, my lady, will you dance with me?" I nodded, and he leaned his cane against a chair and held out his hand to me. Trembling slightly, I let him lead me onto the dance floor. My trembling increased when he put his hand on my waist just before we started to dance.

I don't know whether we were graceful or clumsy, or how long we danced. His eyes never left mine, and he didn't speak. I became aware that he was limping a little, so when the music stopped, I pulled away and said I'd like to rest. He suggested we go outside where the air was cooler.

In the garden, the midnight moon was bright and the air refreshing, but I was not soothed. Instead, my blood thundered in my ears, obscuring the soft words he whispered to me. Among the few words I caught: "My name is Michael; may I know yours?"

"Lura," I said, knowing it wouldn't matter if he knew my name.

He said it softly as he kissed my throat, as his hands caressed my bare arms and shoulders. The skin on my arms began to tingle as he stroked it, and I watched the fine golden hairs bristle. He didn't notice, perhaps because the hairs were so soft. I thought a trick of moonlight made them appear to thicken into a pelt, and then realized it was not a trick.

My skin shivered under his hands, and he thought I was trembling again and pulled me close, placing his mouth on mine for the first time. "A mistake, this is a mistake," I thought. He continued to kiss me roughly, and I enjoyed his taste even as I tried to stop the kiss. Not prepared to let me go, he pulled at the back of my dress, and, being made of leaves, it ripped easily under his grasping hands.

I tried hard to pull away, my nails cutting through his jacket and shirt as if they, too, were made of leaves. He gasped when my nails cut him and started to let me go, but it was too late. The smell of his blood intoxicated me in a way ale never had.

The glamour on my mask and gown was almost gone, and the leaves were falling. The mask fell away, and when he saw my face he screamed. Without a thought, I lunged forward and silenced him, his blood a savory draught. Dimly, I heard voices in the garden and realized I must get away.

I released him and he dropped to the ground. Crouching beside him, I pulled his mask aside to look at his pale, still face. I said his name, "Michael," still tasting him, still feeling his hands on my body.

Naked now and covered with golden fur, I fled, taking a moment to release my stepmother's horse. As I ran, the sight of my old shoes on my bare limbs made me laugh, and I, normally so sure-footed, fell and rolled, losing one shoe. I jumped up, still laughing. It was as if I had new skin, as if I'd lived my life to that moment with dimmed senses. A thousand scents were in the air, and I could identify all of them — hearth fires built from maple, alder, and pine, the scents of birth; the scents of death. I ran on and on, over soft pine needles, over rough rocks, through streams and rivulets, my feet proof against injury. I heard hounds and riders behind me.

What was left of the human in me feared capture, but the new part reveled in the chase and refused to consider the consequences. The new part mocked me for worrying that my father and stepmother would be blamed for what I had done; it laughed at the idea that mere men and hounds might use a silly shoe to find me. The guilt I felt at taking another's life dulled to a pinprick and, in my new twilight existence, shortly ceased to exist.

Circling the house where I had lived, I picked up the scent of the old woman — old fox was more like it — and followed it far away to the east, looking forward to learning who, and what, I really was.

❄

Artwork by Margaret Organ-Kean

Yvonne Coats writes: "I am from Dubois, Wyoming, but now live in New Mexico with my husband Mike and cat Raven; we are all enjoying sunshine and hot food. When we moved here a year ago, Mike and I made a deal: He would pursue an advanced degree in computer science, and I would write. I'm also a gardener, am in love with photography and movies, and, for reincarnationists, I may be the latest manifestation of the Bear Who Went Over the Mountain (I love to hike to the highest point around then sit and admire the view). I'm particularly happy this story is my first sale because the main character is named for my incredible grandmother, Lura Alder Coats."

Margaret Organ-Kean works as a tech writer and systems analyst in addition to her artwork assignments from *Cricket*, *MZBFM*, and Wizards of the Coast (where she illustrated cards in the MAGIC deck, and created all the cards in The Great Dalmuti).

The Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"Bisclavret" by India Edghill**
- 2nd Place: **"A Voice in the Night" by Katherine Blake**
- 3rd Place: **"The Good Witch" by Blake Linton**

Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Jonathan & Lisa Hunt for "A Voice in the Night"**
- 2nd Place: **Omar Rayyan for "Bisclavret" interiors**
- 3rd Place: **Alan Gutierrez for "Familiar With Magic"**

Congratulations to all the winners! To vote for your favorites in *this* issue, use the ballot on page 64.

LETTERS

Opinionated Typesetting

Steve Fahnestalk, Coquitlam, BC, Canada

Just a friendly note for your information:

From the **MLA HANDBOOK** (second printing, ©1977) (since I can't find my Strunk & White) section 14f:

"Commas and periods are placed *inside* (emphasis theirs) quotation marks...all other punctuation goes outside quotation marks, except when it is part of the matter quoted."

This is not commonly known; most people think that periods and commas go outside the quotes — so I don't fault your staff for not knowing; but I thought maybe in future you'd like to have it done the "correct" way — but if not, remember your Kipling: "There are six and ninety ways/of constructing tribal lays/and each and every one of them/is right!"

Steve, the staff and I aren't ignorant, we're opinionated. My preference is to follow what Terabian calls the "logical" school of thought regarding placement of punctuation with respect to quotation marks. Briefly, if the punctuation isn't part of the quote, it doesn't go inside the quotation marks. The best example I can provide comes from the computer field, where one might wish to direct someone to type a specific command into the computer — and that phrase might be the end of a sentence. The computer isn't likely to accept "RUN." when the command is actually "RUN".

The rationale for putting periods and commas inside the quotes came, as I understand it, from the era of lead type. A typesetter worked at a case full of little boxes containing the various letters and symbols, and assembled each line on a piece of grooved wood. Then he moved the piece of wood with its lead characters to the page being typeset, and slid off the characters into the appropriate space on the typeset page. Since the period and comma characters were quite small and might fall off between the composing table and the page, printers decided to put the quotation marks last (they were a bit larger). But in this day and age, it's rare for letters to fall off a computer-composed page. — Rachel Holmen

Courageous Collage

Elizabeth Parsons, Corvallis, OR

When I opened the envelope of issue #37, I was immediately struck by the beauty and power of the mixed images. The skillful blending of birds with the old London scenes gave it a sense of fantasy, though there technically was none in the picture. Very clever and attractive! Your cover story matched the impression the cover left me with perfectly. My favorite story was "Green Man" by Richard Calantropio. It successfully combined the awesome legends of the Druids and Celts with the comfort of old Western dramas. And kudos to Margaret Organ-Kean for her sensitive portrayal of the story. It was exactly as I pictured it in my head, and how I would have illustrated it, if I were able to draw.

Waiting for Marion

Olaf Keith, Münster, Germany

Issue #36 has arrived safely in my letter-box and, as always, it was a pleasure to read your excellent magazine! I am eagerly waiting for the MZB interview announced in the letter column of #33. You wanted to conduct an interview with MZB based on questions sent in by readers of MZBFM. Will this interview be published in a future issue?

Also I would like to know if there is already an updated MZB bibliography available. As always I am including a SAE and two IRCs.

We'll mail you the current bibliography, but if you have access to the World Wide Web, you can always see the latest information on our web page, www.mzbfm.com.

An interview with Marion is proceeding slowly, since her health is still fragile. — Rachel E. Holmen

Writers Awakened

Joshua W. Montandon, Hot Sulphur Springs, CO

I have recently become a fan of your magazine and felt compelled to write and say so. I particularly enjoyed the stories "Opportunity Scratches", by John Fredericks, and "Aisha Awakened", by Ross Hartshorn. "Maiden Phoenix", by India Edghill, was of remarkable quality as well.

Keep up the outstanding work, and thank you for your commentary on my own story, "Valhalla or Bust". I have had an awakening since then and my work has improved because of it. Someday, I'll be good enough to call myself a pro.

James D. Ochs, Santa Barbara, CA

Recently you returned my manuscript titled "Bag Lady". I put the envelope away, not realizing that you had taken the time to make corrections and suggestions. It was only today when I took the manuscript out of the envelope that I realized what you had done.

I apologize for not having thanked you sooner. It is rare indeed for an editor to be so helpful.

Joshua and James: Marion and I are always glad when our suggestions in a rejection letter can help someone improve their craftsmanship as a writer. — Rachel E. Holmen

Controversy and Monkey Business

Greg Koster, Visalia, CA

"The Monkey's Paw" [mentioned in the editorial for FM 37] was written by W.W. Jacobs, a British writer of 1890-1920 vintage...What saddens me is that Jacobs wrote hundreds of stories and a couple dozen novels. Much of it was ephemeral stuff, yet there's a substantial residue of work that is as good as "TMP". Yet it remains in oblivion, for want of champions. Dismal thought for writers. ...I thought "Portrait of My Wife" was the best constructed story I have ever seen in Bradley's...at least one reader thought it would have made O. Henry proud.

Perhaps the Alexandria Digital Library (www.alexlit.com) will be able to reprint Jacobs' work. — Rachel E. Holmen

Phyllis Ann Karr

"The Monkey's Paw" is by W.W. Jacobs.... My choice for first place story might surprise you: "I No Longer Own an Ax" by David J. Sosnowski. I can't resist the folkloric purity of this short tall tale told with such obvious delight in language for its own sake... [praise for] Julia Watts for an exquisite debut — if she can write like this at 18, what will she be doing by 28? ..."Portrait of My Wife" seems too much like Browning's "My Last Duchess" revisited, and in my opinion what variation it rings in does not improve its model. Still, I must give the author credit for choosing the very best to borrow from.

You can't please everybody, so an editor might as well please herself. I liked the story and I bought it. — MZB ❄

THE ENCHANTMENT

by John Buentello

Balcon the mage was seated before his fire, watching the embers crackle and die on the stone hearth, when there came a loud knocking at his door. The mage stretched and yawned, pulling at muscle still firm and strong after centuries of life. He ignored the intrusion at the moment, hoping whoever it was would simply go away. The knocking resumed almost immediately.

Muttering beneath his breath about fools and idiots, Balcon took up his staff and advanced on the door. His anger was so great he almost forgot to check for spell presence. When he stopped and held his staff out before him, his eyes narrowed in surprise. His staff was glowing with a hot blue light, signaling the presence of powerful magic beyond the door.

Casting a spell of protection and imperviousness, he hooked his fingers around the door handle and slowly pulled the oaken slab open, peering out into the night mist. At first he could see nothing, but then a scratching sound drew his eyes downward, and Balcon regarded the fox that stood sniffing at his boots.

"Is this a poor joke of some sort?" he asked, looking around for the animal's owner. "Come out and show yourself."

"I have," the fox answered, in a voice more animal than human. "I am Souvet, and I have come seeking your help."

Balcon was astonished at the animal's gift of speech, but much to his credit, he showed little of his surprise. Instead, he leaned on his staff and stared at the fox closely. "Is the name supposed to mean something to me?"

The fox sniffed and regarded the mage with angry eyes. "My father is Halfar the Mighty. You were the one who sealed his oath in marriage, and blessed his firstborn on the eve of my birth." He sniffed again and whipped the snow-white tuft of his tail. "I am your godson."

Now Balcon recalled the name. Halfar the Mighty. The mighty oaf. A lowlands king who had cut a swath of blood and treachery through half a dozen small kingdoms. The marriage between Halfar and King Ort's daughter had been a peace treaty as well. Halfar had settled down after that, especially after the birth of a son who proved to be more of a lout than his father.

"The last I heard," Balcon said to the fox, "was that you had been sent abroad to a gentlemen's school. I didn't think you'd ever be back."

"I was expelled," Souvet replied. He walked past the mage and settled himself next to the stone hearth. "That's better. That night wind was giving me a chill. As I was saying, I was released from my schooling. Some rule about not having wenches on the grounds, or some such."

"Trollop trolling is generally not an approved part of the curriculum," Balcon said. He held fast to his staff, even though he knew the creature before him was indeed his godson. The signs of magic that had been used to enchant him still glowed upon the staff.

"So what brings you to the hills?" the mage asked.

"I told you, I need your help. In case you've failed to notice, I've been enchanted."

"An appropriate guise, too." The mage cast a spell of seeing on the fox, watching as the magic aura around the creature became visible. "A potent spell, at that. Someone wanted you to remain a fox."

"Someone wished to keep me from my beloved," the fox replied. "I was enchanted by the father of my heart's desire."

Balcon nodded. It was always the way where youth was concerned. You never saw a mature man enchanted on account of something so inconsequential as the love of a woman. He could recall though, in his own youth, having been cast into the form of a bed warmer, because of a certain —

"Well," Souvet barked, interrupting the mage's train of thought. "Are you going to help me or not?"

Balcon ignored the breach of etiquette and looked through his spell of seeing once more. He shook his head. "The spell is too potent. To undo the fox, I would have to undo you as well."

Souvet stood up and whipped his

tail in anger. "Then what will you do?"

"Me? I will do nothing. You must ask the mage who enchanted you to release you."

"I can't!" Souvet cried. His pointed ears drooped a little. "He did this to me to keep me from his daughter. He would never agree, unless—" A sly grin broke over his face. "You could ask him to do it!"

Balcon sat in his chair and stoked the fire with the tip of his staff. "Why should I?"

"Because!" Souvet answered. "He holds my dear Devone a virtual prisoner in his castle. He stands in the path of true love. Because you promised my father you'd keep me out of trouble!"

Balcon couldn't argue the last point. He had offered his services in that regard; more to Souvet's mother than to his oaf of a father. Perhaps marriage would settle the lad down, as it had done with his father. Perhaps the girl's father would listen to reason.

"What is this mage's name?"

Souvet's eyes flashed with anger. "Foreen the Unforgiven."

A gurgle escaped Balcon's throat, a wrathful sound born of memories past. In his mind he saw himself a young mage, standing on a high cliff while around him a storm turned on the wind, hurling lightning down to the sea. Foreen the Unforgiven stood on a peak opposite his, laughing at the other's inability to match his magic. Foreen had shamed him that day, had shown him for the novice he was. Balcon had never forgotten his first challenge and defeat to his power as a mage.

He stared at the fire for an immeasurable time, then brought himself from the comfort of his chair and strode over to the door. "Begone, son of Halfar. I can do nothing for you."

The fox did not move from the hearth. "Foreen said you would be afraid to face him."

"He said what?" A harsh glow sprang from the staff and clung to the mage's robe like a cloak of fire. Balcon stepped to the fox and grabbed him up by the scruff of the neck. "You told him my name? You involved me in this stupid conflict of yours?"

"I can tell you're upset," the fox replied.

"I should skin you and lay your hide by the fire to warm my feet!" Balcon growled. He released the animal and began to pace the room. "The most powerful mage in the hills and you involve me in your affairs with his daughter."

"I was told by my father that you were the most powerful mage around," Souvet said.

"That's not the point!" Balcon shouted. He clutched his staff tightly in his hands. "There are reasons Foreen is still unforgiven. The death of more than a dozen of my fellow mages being one of them."

"So you are afraid?" The fox made the statement a stinging accusation. "Foreen said you would crawl from such a challenge. I believe that's why he let me go."

Balcon opened the door and stepped out into the night.

He stared up at the bowl of stars spinning above him, trying to read the signs. After a few minutes he frowned and gave up, marching off toward the stable.

"Where are you going?" Souvet called from the doorway.

"To force Foreen to return you to human form," the mage yelled back over his shoulder. "And after he does, I think I'll turn you into a fish. At least they're quiet!"

The castle of Foreen the Unforgiven was impressive. Balcon had to give the mage credit for amassing a great amount of wealth over the years. While material riches were not the main reasons for being a mage, neither were they frowned upon.

Balcon found him wanting in other areas, however. His staff remained cool and dark as he and Souvet approached the castle. The little magic that was present seemed in place to keep nothing more than wild animals away from the castle. Foreen apparently felt he could handle any other kind of intruder himself.

A servant met them at the entrance to the castle, bowing low to show off his bald pate. "Greetings, Master Balcon. My Master extends the hospitality of his home."

"We were expected?" Souvet asked from his place beside the mage. Balcon glared down at the fox. His foot itched with the temptation to give him a good sound kick.

"Of course we were. Foreen knew we would come."

The servant led the pair down a long hallway lit by golden braziers. He left them in a room hung with dark tapestry, filled with an array of weapons. Pikes, axes, swords and maces lay upon cushions of velvet, all of them shattered or broken in some manner.

"What is all this?" Souvet asked as he sniffed at a shattered lance.

Artwork by Lynne Fahnestalk

"Foreen's trophy room," Balcon replied. "These must have belonged to former challengers to his power. Foreen wants me to know he still remains undefeated."

Souvet sat on his haunches, looking up toward the high ceiling. "Somewhere up there in Foreen's tower, Devone lies waiting. Locked away from me forever!"

Balcon yawned and found a place to sit. "Why is it you wealthy young men always take after the daughter of someone like Foreen? Why not the daughter of a butcher, or a candle-maker?"

Souvet was not listening. His eyes hardened to black glass as he stared around the room. "All this wealth, all of this power at his command."

"All of which you will never have," a low voice said from behind them. Souvet turned in surprise to see Foreen step from behind a large tapestry. Balcon did not turn or rise from his seat. He called a greeting from his place.

"Hail, Foreen, old enemy of mine."

"Hail, Balcon, maker of smoke dragons and wooden trolls," Foreen replied.

Balcon kept his temper and rose slowly to his feet. He leaned on the staff, which was already glowing red-hot. He faced the lord of the castle, a slight smile breaking on his lips. The centuries might have been favorable to the mage in terms of power, but the squat, balding, overweight man who stood before him carried every year of his centuries upon him.

"I did not think you would really come," the aged mage said slowly.

"Years ago, I wouldn't have come," Balcon replied. "Age does things to one's pride."

"Make him release me from this enchantment!" Souvet interrupted. He bared a formidable set of fangs at the elder mage. "Change him into a mouse, and I'll tear him apart."

Foreen's expression hardened. "So, you are here to help this pup steal Devone away."

"Actually," Balcon began, but he saw his explanation was already too late. The mage made an almost invisible gesture with his right hand, and the room brightened with the glow of magic. Balcon watched the broken lances and swords quiver on the velvet stand, and then the air was filled with flying weapons.

Taking cover behind a large tapestry, Balcon gestured with his staff. The silken cloth immediately stiffened on its hooks. A lance flew straight into it, bouncing off with an audible sound. Maces, staves and swords followed after, all failing to penetrate the invisible shield cast around the tapestry. Balcon waited until he could hear no more movement, then peered from behind his sanctuary.

The floor was littered with weapons, their enchantment canceled after making contact with the tapestry. Balcon looked around for Souvet, but the fox had vanished during the attack. The mage started for the door to the chamber, but was stopped by a dark shape that suddenly loomed up before him.

"How dare you try to steal what is mine!" Foreen's voice rose from the blackness, which spread like a thick veil toward the mage. Balcon stepped backward, gesturing as he went.

"Really, Foreen. We can't hold on to our children forever, you know."

"Thief!" the unseen mage cried. The blackness formed a crude face which opened massive jaws toward him. Balcon felt the wall at his back, and raised his staff. A white mist slithered from it, forming a slender neck that sprouted smoky scales. The cloud dragon sprang full-size from the staff, revealing a maw holding teeth larger than Balcon himself. Before the dark being could turn to flee the dragon was on it, tearing it to tendrils of black smoke with its jaws. Both creatures

Artwork by Lynne Fahnestalk

became thin as vapor, then vanished in the next instant.

"Not bad for a dragon of smoke," Foreen said. He stood before Balcon once more, adorned in full mage dress. "I would be impressed if I were not so disgusted by your actions."

"My actions?" Balcon was careful to keep his distance.

"Who's turning lowland boys into foxes these days?"

"Souvet," the older mage said suddenly, looking quickly about the room. "My gods, where is he?"

"On his way to rescue this Devone, no doubt. See here, Foreen, if the girl truly loves the young man —"

"Girl?" Foreen's face took on a puzzled look. "What girl?"

"Your daughter," Balcon said. "Devone."

"Devone is not my daughter," Foreen said, rushing to the chamber door and flinging it open. "Devone is a mage demon."

Balcon followed up a winding staircase after the older man. He cursed himself repeatedly for being such a fool, for believing Souvet's story. The son of Halfar the Mighty would try something stupid in his quest for power. Securing the power of a mage demon should have been impossible, unless he convinced someone still more stupid to help him.

Already the walls of the tower they were ascending shook with a sound like peeling thunder. That meant they were too late. Souvet had found the demon. Even so, they could not turn back. A mage demon, a creature of power called from the blackness of some forgotten nether world, represented awesome power. In the hands of someone like Foreen it was bad enough. If Souvet claimed its power, they were all in danger.

"The brat tried to steal the demon the last time he was here," Foreen called back over his shoulder as he climbed. "He begged for forgiveness, so I thought changing him into a fox would prevent him from trying again. This time I send him into oblivion."

Foreen reached the door to the tower chamber just ahead of Balcon. He flung it open, and had just enough time to scream before an invisible hand lifted him bodily from the floor and flung him against a far wall. The elder mage hit the flagstone with a sickening sound and crumbled to the floor.

Balcon didn't bother throwing up a defense spell. He knew such would be useless against the creature. Using his staff, he peered through a wall of seeing and beheld the monster that now was Souvet. The demon stood as high as three men, with gnarled hands that could have held a horse in their grip. Mage-glow surrounded him like a bright sun, and the laughter that rang from his misshapen mouth filled the room with thunder.

"I thank you, Godfather, for helping me."

"So," Balcon said, glancing toward Foreen, who lay unmoving on the floor. "This is your true love. I've seen better choices."

The demon roared with laughter. "Love is, after all, blind. Besides, don't you think such power a beautiful thing?"

"Why merge with the demon? The risk is so great."

"So, too, the reward," Souvet replied. He lowered his huge face toward the mage and smiled, pulling bloated lips back over wicked teeth. "My father sent me away to become a gentleman. What do you think he'll say when he sees how I turned out?"

"Revenge on your father? Halfar isn't worth it."

"His kingdom is," Souvet said. "Add to it the riches and power of that old fool," he said, pointing toward Foreen's body, "and you have more than enough reward worth the risk."

"I cannot let you do this," Balcon said. He raised his staff before him.

"You cannot stop me with that alone." Souvet opened his hands and reached for the mage.

"He is not alone," a voice said from behind them. Mage and demon turned to see Foreen gesture from his position on the floor. A shaft of light leapt from his hand, striking the demon in the face. Souvet cried out in pain and turned to advance toward him.

"Time for your death," he bellowed, opening his great jaws once more.

Balcon stepped behind the demon. His staff burned wildly with power, even as he spoke the spell to fill it with more. He could loose it on the demon, but Souvet would probably not be stopped by it. Instead, he lifted the staff high over his head, and with all his strength, plunged one end of it into the glowing flesh of the demon's back.

Souvet screamed and clawed at the glowing pole lodged deep within him. He managed to get a clawed hand on its end just as Foreen loosed another bolt of energy. The magical light struck the staff, traveled along its length, and disappeared into the demon's body. For an instant, all sound in the chamber ceased. Then Souvet screamed again, and the demon swelled and exploded outward like a small star.

Balcon did not see or hear for a time. When his vision at last returned he stumbled over to where Foreen lay and lifted him to a sitting position. Foreen's chest moved slowly at first, then his eyes opened and he let out a long breath. He smiled when he saw Balcon beside him, and looked around the ruined room. There was no trace of the mage demon.

"Please," a voice called from the center of the room, where the roof had cracked and fallen to the floor. "I can't move."

Balcon walked over and shifted some of the stone from the pile of rubble. He lifted the fox, covered with dust, from the debris. Souvet had a deep cut along his nose, and a puncture wound at the small of his back where the staff had entered. Otherwise, he seemed sound. Balcon removed his cloak and wrapped the fox in it.

"What are you going to do with him?" Foreen asked as he regained his feet.

Balcon shrugged and regarded the fox. "A stew, perhaps." He watched Souvet's eyes widen in terror. "Perhaps I'll send him back to his father. Halfar can decide what to do with him." He looked at the older man. "What of the mage demon?"

"Gone," Foreen said. "I'm afraid he took your staff with him." The mage reddened slightly. "I owe you much, Balcon."

"You owe me a staff," Balcon said. "You can send it to my home at your leisure."

Foreen nodded. "It will be the best, and I will hand deliver it myself."

"You will be welcome," Balcon said. He grinned at the fox whimpering in his hands. "I wonder if Halfar will say the same for his son?"

❄

John Buentello is a Texas-based writer who is currently at work on a book for children. He divides his time between writing, teaching in the public school system, and spending time with his family.

Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk has been working as a professional artist for over fifteen years.

Dragon's Treasure

by Robyn Patricia Hansell

The village of Libra was small, as villages go, but looked peaceful, nestled between the Shornay mountains, a welcoming patch of green amongst the snowy passes. Drayla shifted her two-handed sword, Dragonslayer, to a more comfortable position between her shoulderblades and headed down the slippery slope, anxious for a warm bed and a hot meal at the nearest inn.

She had come here because of a rumor of a large dragon in the area, one that apparently had a liking for thieves' blood. Drayla didn't really object to the idea of a thief-eating dragon, as she strongly believed that one thief was one too many, but the master of the Thieves' Guild had offered a large reward for the dragon, and a larger one for the dragon's treasure. Drayla sighed. There had also been the unspoken threat against her reputation for dragon killing, making this trip, in the dead of winter, a necessity.

She settled back on the bench, a few hours later, a warm mug of brew in front of her, as she listened to the local gossip. She finally decided to turn the topic towards her own interests.

"So, what's the local dragon been up to recently?"

There was a pause at the table next to her, and one of the men turned to glance in her direction.

"Ah, so you've 'eard of our Ry, then, have you, stranger?"

"Yes, I have," replied Drayla. "I was interested in learning whether the rumors of this dragon's preference for thieves' blood were true or not."

"Oh, it's true, all right," piped up another at the table, "so if you be of that following, you'd best be out of 'ere by morning, if you, er, follow my meaning."

Drayla laughed and patted her sword on the bench beside her. "Oh, I understand you all right, and no, I'm not a member of the Thieves' Guild, I'm a mercenary fighter."

The men around the table nodded in understanding. Mercenaries were usually hired to protect caravans of goods coming and going between villages.

"Well, then, you won't be finding much work around here, I'm afraid. Our Ry, she protects this entire area from Taurs to Sagit, most of the local trading area, in fact. You'd have to go west beyond the mountains to find the kind of work you're looking for, but you're welcome to stay around a few days. So relax and enjoy the change of pace. It must be terribly hectic, to always be on the move."

Drayla nodded and raised her mug in acceptance. "Thanks, I might just do that." And, she thought to herself, I might just get a chance to get close enough to this dragon to see if it's really worth my while.

Drayla wandered around the village for a couple of days, enjoying the slower pace, but also making careful enquiries into the exact whereabouts of the dragon's cave, hunting route, and schedule, all whilst trying to appear interested solely for gossip's sake.

Then, early the third day, she hiked into the hills in search of the elusive dragon. She knew it didn't fly. No dragon that she had ever heard of could go more than a day or so without hunting, and she hadn't seen any signs of a flying dragon and, after seventeen kills to her credit, Drayla definitely knew what to look for.

She came across the trail at noon, the crushed bushes, the fallen trees, the pulverized stones that were now large pieces of gravel, and the unmistakable stench that clung to the surrounding, still-standing greenery. Drayla smiled, and strengthening her resolve against

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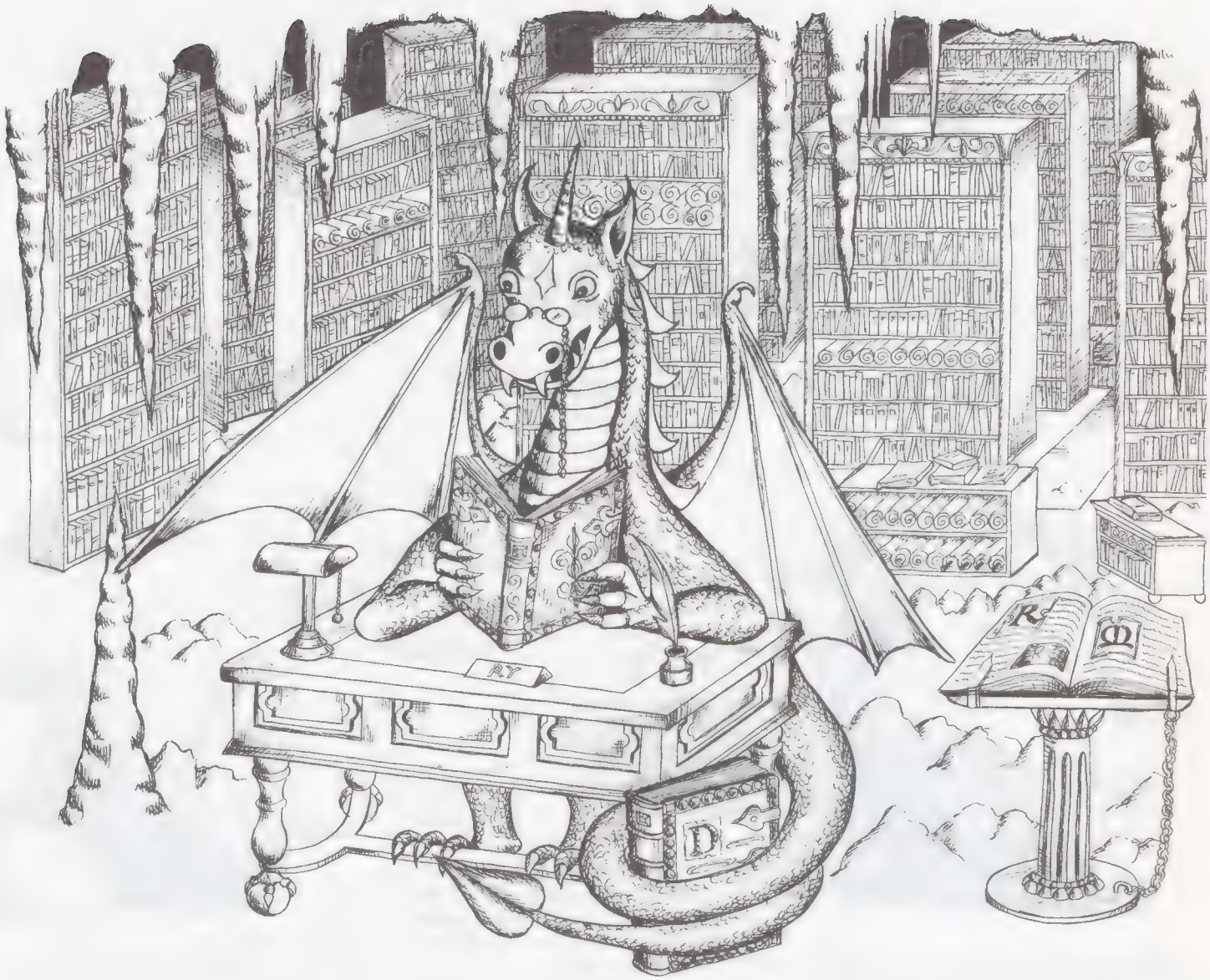


the smell, she headed up the trail, loosening her sword in her sheath as she went, and humming in a flat monotone to keep away the usual butterflies in her gut, hazards of the trade, and all.

The cave mouth looked like any other regular cave entrance, except for the well-done look to the vegetation surrounding it. Drayla glanced around the entrance, and decided that while the stench was stronger in the cave, the owner wasn't home. She went in, looking for the usual pile of gold and jewels that dragons normally slept on.

Drayla rounded the last turn of the tunnel and came into the main room of the cave. As she turned around, she gasped in awe at the size of the cave. There was a relatively small hole in the ceiling, letting in the daylight, which helped illuminate the dragon's hoard. A desk sat in the middle of the floor, an open book with a dragon scale marking the place in its center. All around the walls were hundreds of bookcases, all packed full of thousands of books, scrolls, manuscripts, and volumes of every conceivable topic known to man, and then some. Drayla was still awestruck when a voice came from behind her.

"Ah, I see you like my treasure."

Drayla spun round; her fighter training had her hand instinctively reaching for her blade as she faced the bespectacled dragon. The wyrm ignored her and slithered over to the desk with its open text, curled her tail around the desk, and began to read.

The dragon finally looked up at the puzzled mercenary. "What, didn't they tell you that the Bookwyrm of Libra, Ry's treasure was books?"

❄

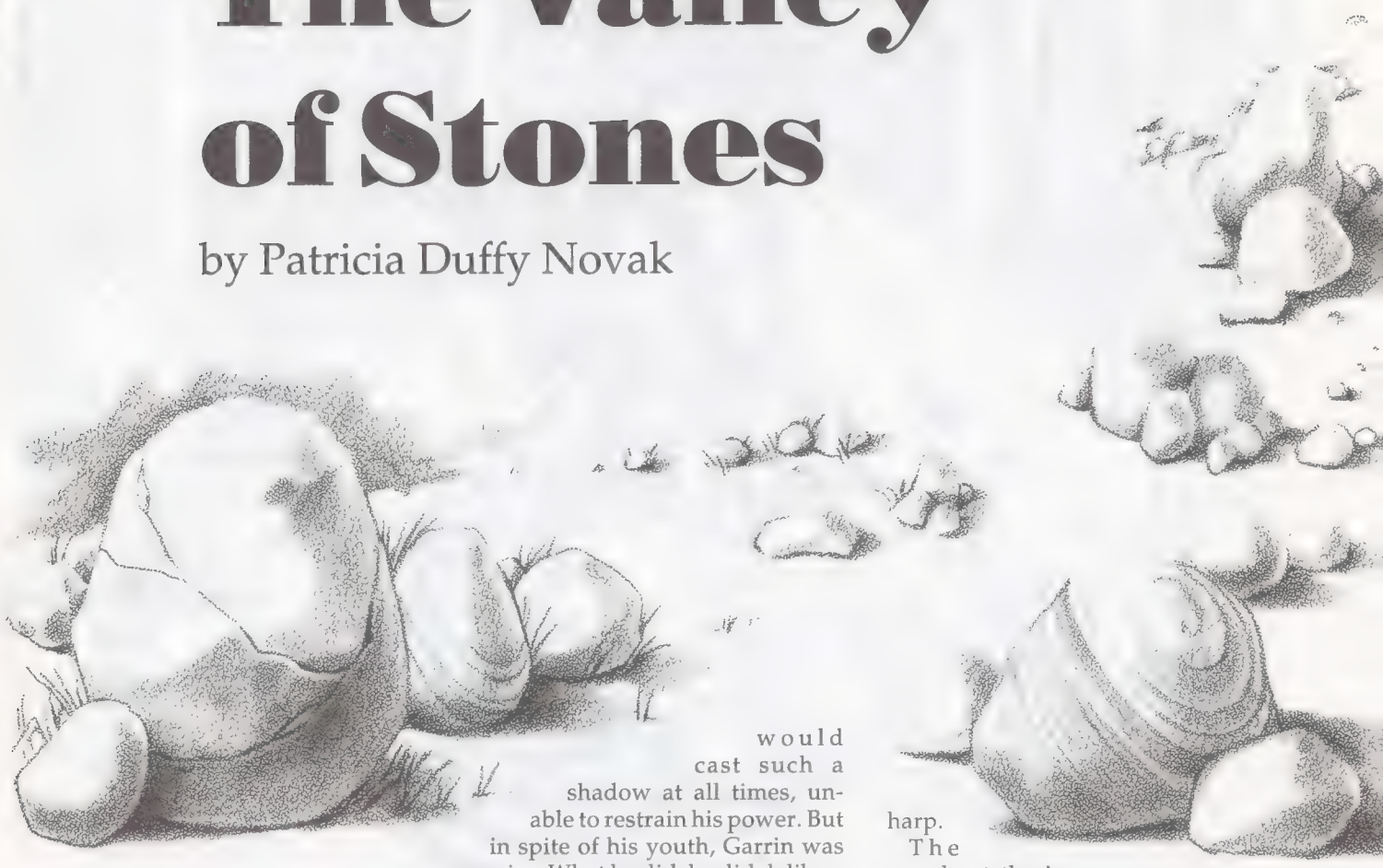
Robyn Patricia Hansell learned to read at the age of two and a half and hasn't been seen without a book since. She has a B.Sc. from the University of Toronto with majors in Zoology (animal behavior) and Criminology, a combination which apparently was perfect for the three years she worked part-time for the Canadian artillery reserve. She lives in a Toronto "shoebox" with the requisite writer's cat, Mythrandir, and she's still looking for a job where she can be paid to read. This is her first sale.

Margaret Davis lives in Oakland, CA, where she occupies herself with illustration, calligraphy, singing, harping, fluting, and recordering, in no particular order. Her illuminated calligraphy and illustration can be found in Northwest convention art shows and private collections.

Artwork by Margaret Davis

The Valley of Stones

by Patricia Duffy Novak



Artwork by K. L. Darnell

Sunlight slanted across the barren escarpment, and the still air shimmered with heat. Garrin studied the array of boulders, seeking a particular outline, a tell-tale shape.

Nothing.

And yet, he felt that tingle along his nerves that told him she was near. Somewhere in this group of rocks, she was hidden. If he unleashed a mage-bolt, he could destroy all the stones, but such an action would be harmful to this fragile land and wasteful of Garrin's own energy. Two years ago, when he'd first begun scouting the border, he might have chosen that course, but he'd learned patience in the intervening years. All he needed to do was wait.

He dropped to a sitting position in the dust. Weakening his power shields, he freed a trace of mage-glow. A faint cloud, visible to any with the Sight, rose around him. A novice wizard would cast such a shadow at all times, unable to restrain his power. But in spite of his youth, Garrin was no novice. What he did, he did deliberately. Bait for the trap.

Two young mages already this hag-demon had killed, draining their life forces along with their magic. Garrin knew, without any sense of pride, that in himself the demon would finally meet her match. When night fell and she woke from her stone dreams, his leaking aura would lure her. Irresistible as cold ale to a thirsty man.

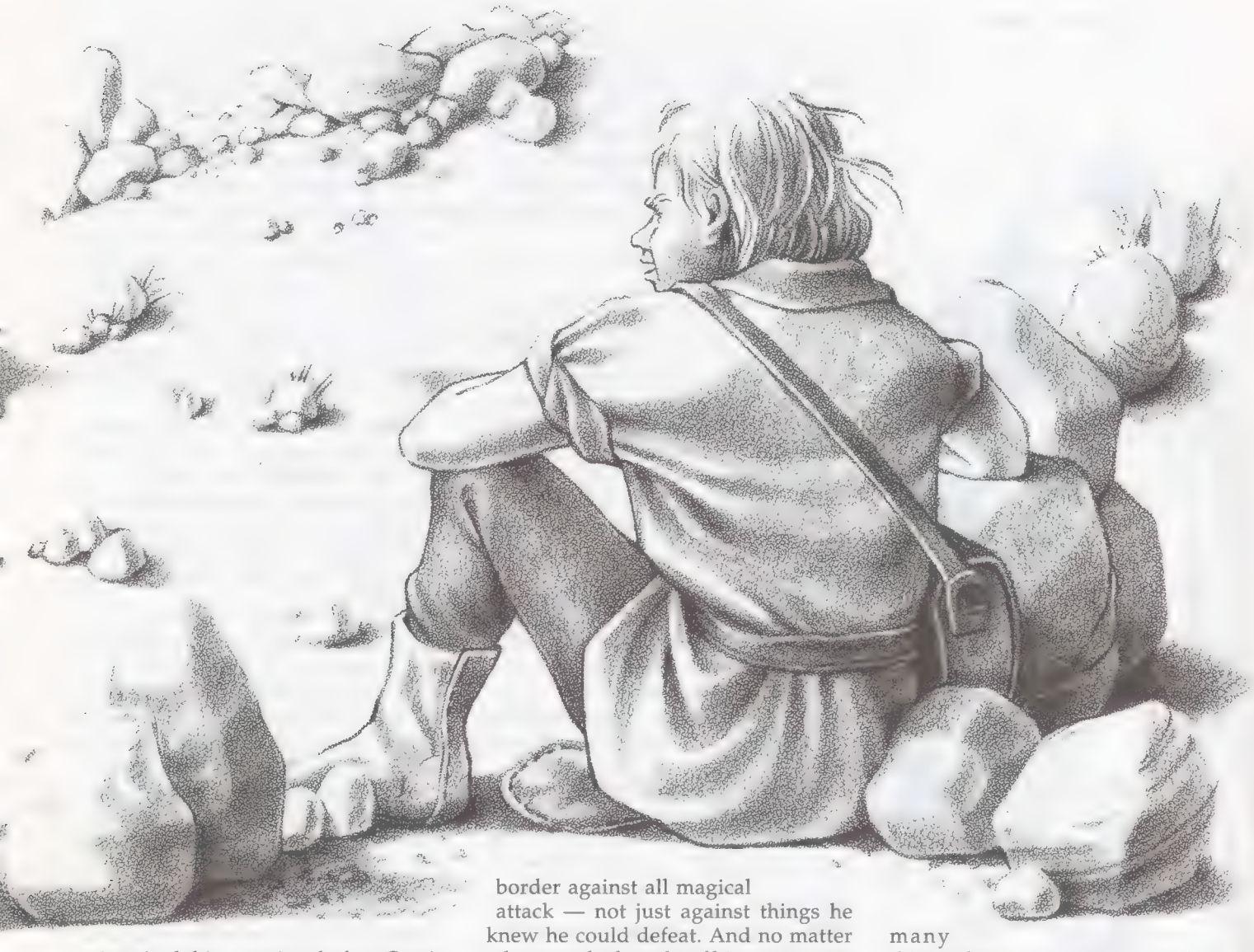
His horse, Fanfare, wandered among the dry stubble of grass, seeking the occasional shoots of wild garlic or fairytongue that grew in the declivities. Garrin felt a twinge of sympathy for the animal. He wished now he had left the gelding at the river, half mile back, where the pickings were not so slim. But Fanfare would not suffer much; the horse had fed well this morning at the inn, a bonus of grain from the innkeeper, who had been well pleased with Garrin. The night's business had been brisk, thanks to Garrin and his harp.

The people at the inn didn't know Garrin's true name or his real purpose in the border. They thought him a wandering bard, and so they welcomed him each time he came into a village — children ran to him, and their parents smiled.

As Sean the Bard, he was not despised.

Garrin closed his eyes, wondering why he cared what people thought. He was a wizard, gods-gifted with a talent stronger than that of any other mage now living. And he supposed that possession of such power might make many another man happy, but he took no pleasure in his gifts. Rather, the power hung on him, like a chain.

Something tickled his awareness. He glanced about, at the scattered stones, feeling an odd sense of uneasiness that had nothing to do with the demon. Last night at the inn in Charlihold, one of the customers had warned him not to venture too far north into the moun-



tains. And this morning, before Garrin set out, the innkeeper himself had made the sign against evil and mumbled something about the valley of stones across the river. But the hills were full of superstition, and Garrin had paid no heed.

He opened his Other-Sight, attempting a full reading of whatever it was he had sensed. A surge of invading power flooded him, almost taking his breath away.

He rose shakily to his feet, fighting the urge to run. His heart thumped loudly and sweat beaded on his brow. Knowing himself and his own reactions, he was certain this terror was an artifact of whatever force haunted this valley, not a real emotion, born of his own free mind. But his body responded all the same.

The panic inside him urged him to blast the stones — the fragile land be damned — then mount Fanfare and flee. But he had pledged to guard the border against all magical attack — not just against things he knew he could defeat. And no matter what people thought of him — no matter what they whispered when his back was turned — he had never been false to his word.

This panic is not mine. I disown it. He gulped air, then forced his breaths to a steady rhythm. The panic dissipated, like fog in the sun.

"Well done, Garrin Windson."

He turned to face the voice that had come from nowhere. The speaker wore a woman's form. Not old, but not young. Rosy rays of sunlight gleamed on the shining white fabric of her flowing robes. His highly trained mage-senses told him she was not human, but neither was she the demon he sought. No creature of the Night could walk in daylight. Who was she, then, and what was she doing here?

He looked into the being's amber eyes, but could read no emotion there. "How do you know my name?"

She smiled, an expression that conveyed neither mirth nor threat. "I know many things about you, young man."

Perhaps his entire mind was open to her. He knew mages who held this power, although he himself did not. "Who are you?"

"I am no friend to wandering wizards. You should not have come to my valley."

Her valley? Garrin tried to hide his surprise. Just what sort of being was she, to make such a claim? "I didn't mean to trespass," he said. "I didn't have a choice. I took oaths to protect this border." He pointed at the scattered boulders on the valley floor. "A demon slumbers here."

An enigmatic smile played across the being's lips. "So, you kill demons to protect the humans of the borderlands. And yet you neither hate the ones nor love the others." She stepped toward him, no longer smiling. Her robes trailed in the dirt but no dust rose in her wake. "In your soul I see no love for anyone or anything."

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Artwork by K. L. Darnell

He gazed into those odd, amber eyes, wanting to deny what had been said. But he could not, without telling a lie. A talent too strong to forsake bound him to the Order of Wizards. A separate and private oath kept him loyal to a wastrel king. But love? No. That he did not feel. "I am not without feelings, lady."

The smile flicked back into place. "That is not what I said."

He stared at the woman's form that stood before him. Proud, like an old matriarch of a hill tribe. Splendid, in her way. "What do you want from me?"

"What I want is of no consequence. But you are another matter. You are dangerous, Garrin Windson, more dangerous than you know."

He stiffened. For years the rumors had dogged him, blame for a crime he had not committed. "I have done no wrong."

She eyed him coldly. "It is not what you have done but what you might do that I fear. You have entered my valley and you will receive my judgment."

The being raised a hand, and Garrin felt a surge of warmth along his spine. "You are free," she said. "Free to do as you will."

He raised his hand, pushing out with his mage-strength, and saw nothing. No flare of light. No burst of power. He tried again. Nothing. He felt neither anger, nor sorrow. Only a dull sense of something lost.

"If you leave my valley, your mage-gift will stay with me." She pointed to the crimson sun. "In less than an hour, the demon will wake. Human blood is not as attractive as mage-power, but in the absence of better, it will do."

Garrin glanced at the sun, then looked across the valley where Fanfare poked lazily among the litter of stones. In an hour, they could be over a dozen miles away, well on their way to the inn. A sturdy stall and a good feed of oats for the horse. Cool ale and an admiring audience for the man. And he would be released, free of the gift that bound him to king and Order, free to pursue the talent that did bring him joy. Free to be Sean the Bard.

A thousand possibilities presented themselves to him, flashing in and out of his thoughts, all of them taking less than a second to dismiss.

He strode across the valley to the place where Fanfare grazed and unfastened his saddle bags and the case that held his harp. The bags he let drop to the dirt, then placed the harp case gently atop them. "Fanfare, to post." He slapped the horse's rump with the heel of his hand, and the animal trotted off in the direction they had come.

Garrin watched the dust kicked up behind the gelding's hooves. Not long after dark, Fanfare would reach the inn in Charlihold, where Garrin knew it would be treated well until he could reclaim it. If Garrin never returned, the innkeeper would be glad of the horse, which was a valuable animal.

When Fanfare was completely out of sight, Garrin picked up his bags and harp.

The being intercepted him. She stared at him, her amber eyes wide and unmoving. "What have you done?"

Garrin returned her stare with a level gaze of his own. "I was given a job and I will complete it. I didn't want to place the horse at risk. Animals have blood, too, lady."

She shook her head. "Don't you understand? Your powers are gone. The demon will have you for dinner."

"I know about demons, lady." In the two years since he'd earned the title of Wizard of the Ways, he'd killed over a dozen demons. Indeed, he knew them well, the shades of their cunning, the limits of their understanding. With skills other than magic — and a little luck — he could perhaps defeat this one. He scanned the area, seeking a place to build a fire.

The being didn't move from his path. "You risk your life to reclaim powers you don't want? You are either very brave or very foolish."

"Perhaps I am neither, lady." Garrin shrugged. "If you'll excuse me, I'd better get on with my plans. To delay any longer would be foolish, indeed."

She continued to study him, her eyes fixed on his in a gaze that made him feel the weight of some judgment she did not speak. He bowed and moved away, stepping nimbly past her. A moment later, when he looked over his shoulder, she was gone.

Clouds of strongly-scented smoke rose from the skillet into the dusky air. With a long, wooden spoon, Garrin stirred the mixture of chopped garlic and sunflower-seed oil, flattening the bulbs into a paste. The oil he'd happened to carry with him; the garlic he'd dug from the banks of the river.

On a kerchief spread on the ground before him, he'd arranged a half dozen

slices of the flat waybread he'd taken from the inn. He removed the skillet from the fire, set it on the sand, and spooned the garlic paste over the bread.

When the paste cooled, he ate. One slice after another, with neither enjoyment nor appetite. The bread made the paste more palatable, but it was not the kind of thing he cared to eat. His skin he had already rubbed with fairytongue, and the pungent odor of that herb mingled with the scent of garlic, almost making him ill.

Sunflower seeds. Garlic. Fairytongue. The ingredients of a demon-bane. When he was a boy, growing up in a mountain village far to the west of this valley, he'd learned from an old healer woman how to make herbal simples. Jianne was dead, like everyone else in Avenore, but he carried her teachings in his heart.

Garrin picked up his water skin and took a long drink, but the water could not dispel the heavy flavor of garlic and oil. But the taste, Garrin knew, was a small price to pay for the protection offered. The demon would not be able to set a hand on him as long as the bane held. He hoped it would buy him enough time to carry out the rest of his plan.

Years ago, he'd learned the nature of hag-demons, how they lured a man with the promise of rapture, and then drained blood and power from the victim. The bane he had prepared would keep him safe from that type of attack but demons also worked other forms of magic. She could kill him for spite if he failed to amuse her. Or if she suspected his motives.

The sky darkened. From his saddlepack, Garrin pulled a packet of powder and tossed a handful into the fire. Natural-looking smoke rose in a thin column and spread in a flat cloud above him, making the twilight just a bit darker. He studied the cloud with a critical eye. Enough. It would be enough.

He put the packet of powder on the sand by the fire, and settled himself to face east, his harp in his lap. He wondered if he was perhaps insane, to attempt to best a hag-demon without the use of magic. Or maybe he simply didn't care, one way or the other, if he himself lived or died. Two years he had lived under the shadow of blame. Two years he had walked the mountain trails, feeling only half alive.

Two years since the burning of Avenore.

If the hag-demon defeated him, Sean the Bard might be missed in the mountain inns. But Garrin Windson, Wizard of the Ways, would be mourned by none.

Across the valley, something moaned. Garrin tensed, waiting, as the demon woke. Where a rock had been, a form arose, taking shape in the darkness.

Garrin put fingers to his harp and began to play. His voice rose in accompaniment, the song of Ardoline, the legendary witch-queen of Krell. He knew the power of his voice, a strong baritone that reached to tenor range. He poured his heart into the song, and as he sang, he rewrote the words, turning the legend on its head. Lord Balil was not the hero of this saga, but rather the witch herself — wronged, betrayed by a foolish mortal who didn't understand the gift she offered.

Something walked across the valley. Garrin heard the footsteps crunching on the dry sand. Looking up, he saw her standing at the other side of his fire. She had taken the guise of a beautiful young woman. A leather vest bound her high, rounded breasts. Flowing skirts of red silk wrapped themselves about her legs. Long, blond hair flowed across her slender shoulders. Her dark eyes met his.

In town after town, from the seaside to the mountains, women had offered themselves to Garrin, wanting to steal a trace of his power. He had taken none of them, fearing the trap that could lie behind the gentle gazes. For the first time in two years he was tempted to yield. Those eyes promised a paradise he would never find in this world. "My lady." He bowed his head.

"Bard." Her perfect lips curled into a smile. "Your voice is better protection than your herbs. Go and bathe yourself in the river, so that I can draw near."

For a moment, he wavered, drawn by the promise in her eyes. But then she tossed her hair, and Garrin caught a glimpse of the truth beneath the glamour. Here was a danger far worse than any mortal woman could ever present.

His lust died. "No, my lady." He echoed her smile. "But I will sing for you, if you will. My body would bring you only a moment's pleasure. My voice can bring you a fame greater than Ardoline's."

The demon wet her lips, and a dark cunning flashed in her eyes. Cunning

Artwork by K. L. Darnell

and greed. She raised her hands above her head. Lines of power, much like those he once commanded, flowed from her fingertips, arching into the distance. Strong, but his would have been stronger, if he had not lost his gift. She turned slowly. The fire danced as the wind rose. Sand bit Garrin's exposed skin and he closed his eyes against the sting of it.

And then came water. Showering down upon him in a great sheet, soaking his face and arms, plastering his thin, cotton shirt to his chest. He sputtered and pushed wet hair from his eyes, fear mounting as he realized what she had done. She was clever, this one. More clever by half than any demon he had ever met.

The garlic he had eaten would sweat from his pores for days, but the scent of fairytongue no longer rose from his skin. Garlic alone might discomfort the demon, but it would not protect him from her.

Her smile widened and her teeth elongated into fangs. "You are a fool, young bard. I would have given you a pleasant death if you had done as I commanded. Now you will die slowly and in pain."

She took a step toward him. He met her gaze, facing down the unexpected fear that rose in him. "If you kill me now you will not hear me sing your praises. I wish to sing of your fame, lady. I have sought you, praying for the chance to meet you face to face."

The demon hesitated. Garrin saw the play of her emotions: vanity warring with greed.

She seated herself on the opposite side of the fire, folding her limbs compactly. Her eyes conveyed a mild amusement. Cat to his mouse. "Sing then. Amuse me and I will give you joy in death. Waste my time and you will taste the torments of Hell."

He adjusted the harp in his lap, relieved to find that the soaking had done it little harm. "Tell me your name, lady."

She smiled again, this time without fangs. "Some call me Lauralare."

Garrin's mind moved quickly, searching for flattering rhymes. He was damp and uncomfortable, but in spite of that, his ideas flowed well, bringing him the notes of his first song. The tense muscles in Garrin's shoulders relaxed slightly as he began to sing.

He paused to drink water. Hours of song had rubbed his throat raw, taking his voice from tenor to bass baritone. Every deed of hers that he had learned through the days of tracking her, he had put to rhyme — her escape from the dark mage who'd called her, her journey across Alworyn, the deaths of the two novices. His mind, as well as his fingers were numb. And still the sky was black. He put down the water skin and sat in silence, unable to shape another song.

The demon regarded him with measuring eyes. "You sing well, bard." Her nose twitched, and she grimaced. "A pity about the garlic, but I will give you pleasure in death all the same. Reward for your efforts." She moved toward him, placing one slim hand on his bare forearm. Her fingers felt warm against his skin. Warm and soft. But his flesh crawled all the same.

He looked into her eyes and saw his death. And if he died, she would remain free to ravage the border. How many others would she kill? Desperation lent him strength. "Wait, lady. I have one more song. My best. I would have you hear it."

She took her hand off his arm. Her gaze traveled slowly along his form. "What will you sing of now, bard?" The demon's brows rose and her lips pursed, her face so beautiful he nearly laid down the harp. A mockery of womanhood, he reminded himself. Her beauty no more than an illusion. If he had his mage-sight, he would see death hanging about her shriveled heart. His own death, surely, if he failed.

And he had run out of songs. His mind wheeled and turned, sifting his memories, searching for one last theme. He smiled as an idea caught. A single word, thrown at him that afternoon. "I will sing of love."

At the horizon came the faintest tinge of gray. Almost dawn. He leaned toward the fire, pretending to adjust a log, but all the while reaching for the powder he had placed on the ground. And here was the bit of luck he needed. The packet of powder had not blown away, nor had it been dampened by the water the witch had summoned. While adding a log to the fire, he put a handful into the flames.

The witch glanced at the blackness above their heads, as if measuring the time. "One more song." She seated herself again. "Make it worth my while or I will change my mind about the pleasure. There are many ways to die, bard."

His throat ached; his shoulders throbbed with weariness. His shirt had dried stiff upon him, chafing the skin under his arms. But he knew he must find the strength to make this song worth more than any other he had ever played. Either that, or he would die. And he found, when it came to it, that he really didn't want to die. Not now. Not yet.

Someone had burned his village and made it seem like his doing. Someone, somewhere should pay.

His fingers plucked the strings, finding a likely progression. He closed his eyes and opened his mouth, putting everything into his song. At first he sang to the demon, the emotion in his voice a sham as he poured out flattery, praising her charm and grace. But as the verses formed, his heart stirred at the sound of his own words. In his mind, he no longer sang to this creature, but to someone he had never met. Someone who could love him for himself alone, not for the power he wielded. Years of yearning filled his song. Verse after verse spilled from his throat, breaking upon the valley like waves. Tears flowed down his cheeks, but his voice never faltered.

Sunlight tickled his closed eyelids. Day.

Feeling slightly foolish, he brushed the tears from his eyes. Across from him, on the other side of the smoldering fire-pit, a new boulder rested on the sand. This time, there was no mistaking the shape. He rose to search for more firewood.

"You live." As before,

Moving?

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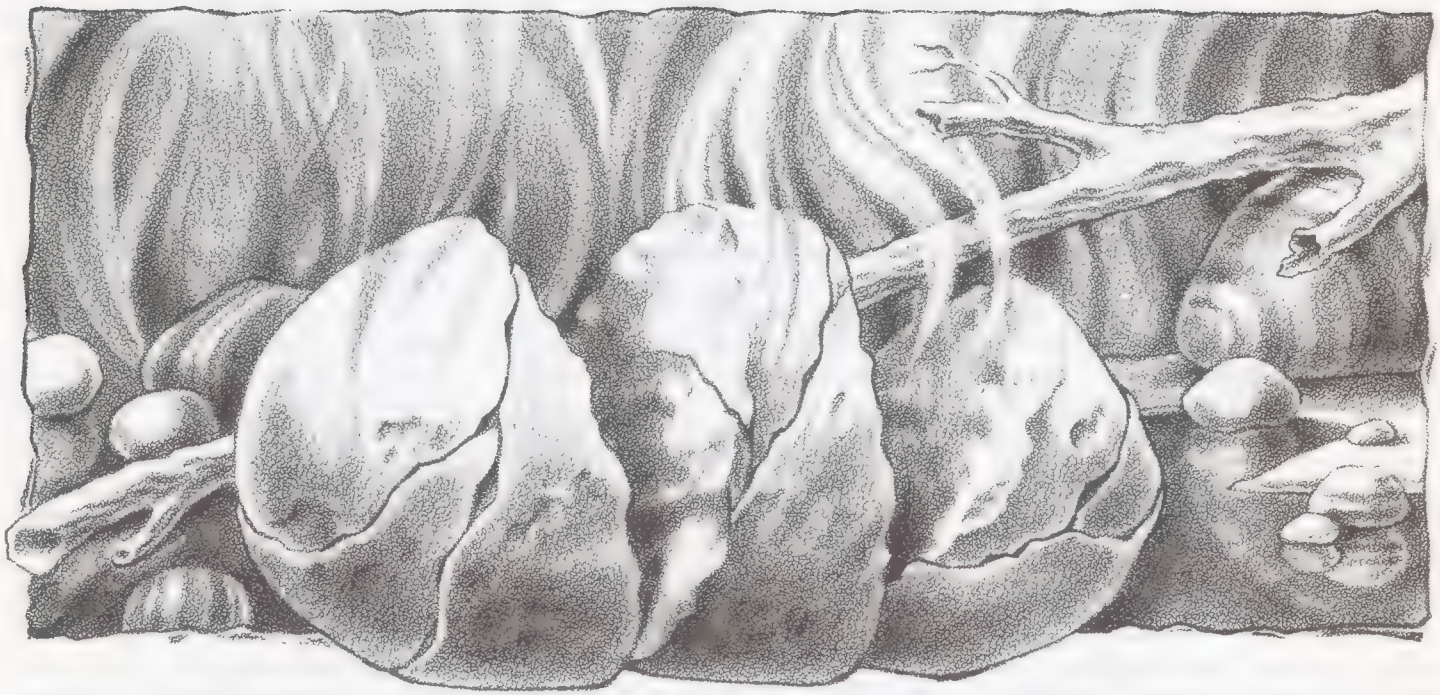

Artwork by K. L. Darnell

the voice appeared without warning. He didn't look up. With a grunt, he pushed the large stone he'd been heating from the fire, using a long stick of green wood as a lever. When the stone came to a rest on the sand, he dropped the stick and picked up the water skin he had filled with cold stream water. He emptied the skin on the rock. Steam rose from the sizzling surface, blinding him. But he heard a satisfying pop. When the steam cleared, he saw that the rock had shattered into three large pieces. The demon would haunt the border no longer. He had done his job.

"You are a clever man, Garrin Windson. And brave, although you say you are not."

He turned to face the being in woman's shape. This morning, her robe was the color of the morning sky, and her face was young. "I have done what I said I would do. Nothing more."

"I gave you freedom. Why didn't you take it?"

He thought of a dozen sour replies, and discarded them. Whoever this being was, she deserved respect. "If you knew me as well as you claim, you would have the answer to that question."

She closed her eyes for a moment. When she opened them, they focused not on his face, but on the horizon. "Duty."

"Duty," he repeated. "I was sent here to perform a certain task. I swore to do it, without conditions. And so I have. Now, if you'll give me my powers back, I'll be on my way. It's a long walk to Charlihold and I had no sleep last night."

The arched brows rose in the unearthly face. "What makes you think I intend to give you your powers back?"

He dropped the empty water-skin he was holding. "You said —"

"I said that if you left this place last night, you would not get your powers back. I never said you would have them if you stayed."

His hands clenched. Once. Briefly. And he shrugged. "No. You did not."

She eyed him thoughtfully. "You're very calm."

"I learned calm years ago. My anger can kill."

Her lips curved. "No. It cannot. Not any longer. You are not a mage."

"Ha!" He surprised himself by laughing. "Of course not. But I seem to have lost the habit all the same."

"What will you do now, Garrin Windson?"

He imagined himself explaining to the Wizards' Council how he'd lost his powers. And then going to the king, asking a release from his bond. "I don't know. I have taken oaths. And those who hold those oaths will decide my fate. I'm still not free. Powers or no."

The being shook her head. "You will never be free. It is not your fate." Amber eyes regarded him solemnly. He met her gaze, but read no answers there. "I am sorry about your village, Garrin Windson. Someday you will find the answers you seek. That is all I can promise you."

His throat spasmed in dry pain. "Who? Tell me who."

"Beyond my power," she said. "In time you will learn and clear your name. In time."

He let out his breath in a long exhale. Here at least was hope. "Thank you."

"And if you could choose to have your mage-gift returned, would you take it?"

He nodded. Once, slowly. "I would."

The being raised her hand and Garrin felt the same warm tingling along his spine he had felt the day before.

He turned his hand and light flowed from it. The burden of his power settled on him again. His burden, and he realized now that he did not wish to give it up, for all the pain it cost him. "Why have you returned my gifts? Because I held to duty?"

She shook her head. A breeze blew across the valley, but it didn't seem to touch her hair or robe. "Duty is a sad conceit, young man. I returned your powers because I heard your song. Despair has not entirely poisoned your heart."

Heat rose in his face as he remembered the tears that had flowed unchecked down his cheeks. His weakness. This longing he could not satisfy for something beyond duty and vows.

"Love is not a weakness." Something like compassion glinted in her eyes. "It is a strength. Learn to use all your gifts — heart as well as mind — and you will fulfill the promise the gods see in you."

"The gods —" He broke off, shaking his head. "Is that what you are? A god?"

"Once I was what you humans call a god. No longer. I am bound to this valley as surely as you are bound to your duty."

"Ah." He knew her then. One of the Old Ones, who lingered in secluded places. Sleeping through centuries, awakening only rarely. He had been blessed to see her.

Or cursed, he thought, remembering the night's business.

Her robe fell in good, clean lines from her shoulders to the ground. Her eyes sparkled with wisdom more ancient than the stones of the valley. Her hands came together. Long, thin fingers barely touching.

Blessed, he decided. "Pray for me, lady."

"I will, Garrin Windson." As she spoke, she turned transparent, her robe spreading on the hot wind. "I will pray you learn to love."

The last words came from the valley itself. The Old One had vanished. For a full fifty beats of his heart, Garrin stared at the place where she had been standing. Strength. Duty. Pain. These things he knew. But not love.

He collected his belongings and walked from the valley. Behind him, the wind piped a wild chord across the stones. He held his harp tucked under one arm, and carried his bags slung across one shoulder. Heavy but he didn't mind their weight. In spite of the night he had passed, he no longer felt weary.

Summer in the mountains had its own kind of peace. The hot wind stirred the branches of the pines. Birds sang in the distance, light trilling calls.

He would reach Charlihold by dinner-time. A crowd would come to hear him sing. Harp in hand in the common room of the inn, he would taste the freedom he had given up. He knew he would have regrets. Always, inevitably, choice brought regret. But choice was freedom of a kind, and he believed he had chosen well. He smiled as he walked, settling into a steady rhythm as the miles glided effortlessly beneath his boots.

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"The Valley of Stones" is **Patricia Duffy Novak**'s fifteenth sale to Marion Zimmer Bradley. She has also sold stories to *Realms of Fantasy* and *Adventures of Sword and Sorcery*. She's writing a series of novels set in the world of "The Valley of Stones"— which is also the world of several of her other short pieces, including "Robes" in **SWORD AND SORCERESS X**. She is a professor of Agricultural Economics at Auburn University. She lives in Alabama with her husband, daughter, and pets.

K. L. Darnell has been a professional illustrator and calligrapher since 1981. In that time she has drawn everything from fiddle fine tuners to feet — from dancers to dinosaurs. Her favorite subject, however, is stones. She lives and works in East Lansing, MI, with her husband and daughter.

BACK ISSUE DESCRIPTIONS

___#2 (Fall 1988) – *Bone Serai* - cover story by Susan Shwartz; George Barr cover
___#3 (Winter 1989) *The Adinkra Cloth* - Mary C. Aldridge.
___#5 (Summer 1989) – "The Dragon Issue" Cover art by George Barr.
___#7 (Winter 1990) – *Daughter of the Oak* - David M. Shea. *The Hall of the Winter Folk* - cover story by Stephen C. Fisher.
___#8 (Spring 1990) "Science-Fiction/Fantasy" Issue. *Change* - cover story by Jo Clayton; cover art by James Balkovek.
___#14 (Fall 1991) – *Black Ribbon* - Dawn Albright; cover by Gail Butler.
___#16 (Spring-Summer 1992) – *Never Look at a Gift Sword in the Horse's Mouth* - Jennifer Roberson; cover by Alan Gutierrez.
___#17 (Fall 1992) – *Pandemonium* - Sue Young Wilson; cover by George Barr.
___#18 (Winter 1992) – *Arakney's Web* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nick Jainschigg. *The Black Tower* - Laura Underwood.
___#20 (Summer 1993) – *Cannibal Sorcerer* - Evangeline Walton & Bruce D. Arthurs. *Maiden, Are You Warm?* - Isabel Cole.
___#21 (Fall 1993) – *First Love, Last Love* - Tanya Huff. *Mages of Carthia* - Cynthia McQuillin.
___#22 (Winter 1993) – *Mad Evren's Dreams* - Phyllis Ann Karr; cover by Alicia Austin.
___#23 (Spring 1994) – *Killer Byte* - Mercedes Lackey; cover by Vincent Di Fate. *To Kill the Undead* - Marion Zimmer Bradley.
___#24 (Summer 1994) – *Ice Princess* - Elisabeth Waters; cover by David Cherry. *The First Maxim* - Steven Piziks. Katherine
___#25 (Fall 1994) – *The Masterpainter* - Diana L. Paxson; cover by Jill Bauman. *On the Holy Mountain* - Darrell Schweitzer.
___#26 (Winter 1994) – *Dinner Music* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nick Jainschigg. *Fool's Fire* - Marion Zimmer Bradley.
___#27 (Spring 1995) – *Pot of Dreams* - C.J. Cherryh & Jane S. Fancher; cover by David A. Cherry.
___#28 (Summer 1995) – *The Harder They Fall* - Tanya Huff; cover by Bob Eggleton.
___#29 (Fall 1995) – *Bloodsong* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nicholas Jainschigg. *Humphrey's Dilemma* - Cynthia McQuillin.
___#30 (Winter 1996) – *A Prince Among Frogs* - Elisabeth Waters; cover by Jonathan Hunt.
___#31 (Spring 1996) – *The Weeping Loon* - RobinWayne Bailey; cover by James Balkovek
___#32 (Summer 1996) – *Fox Maid's Travail* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nick Jainschigg.
___#33 (Fall 1996) – *A Sphinx in the Mind* - Karen Anderson; cover by Margaret Organ-Kean
___#34 (Winter 1997) – *Thin Man* - Steven Piziks; cover by George Barr
___#35 (Spring 1997) – *Maiden Phoenix* - India Edghill; cover Vincent Di Fate
___#36 (Summer 1997) – *The Knife that Makes Men* - Mary Aldridge; cover by Alicia Austin and George Barr.
___#37 (Fall 1997) – *Grey* - Mercedes Lackey; cover by Nicholas Jainschigg
___#38 (Winter 1998) – *Bisclavret* - India Edghill; cover by Margaret Davis
___#39 (Spring 1998) – *Escape Artists* - Susan Shwartz; cover by David Cherry

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INTERVIEW

An Interview With Connie Willis

by Steven Piziks

Connie Willis, a tall, bespectacled woman with red hair and glasses, has won record numbers of Hugos and Nebulas. Her novels include **THE DOOMSDAY BOOK**, **LINCOLN'S DREAMS**, and **BELLWETHER**. This interview was conducted at ConFusion of the Winnebagos in Warren, Michigan, where she was Guest of Honor.

MZBFM: The preliminary ballot for the Nebulas is out, and you're on it.

Connie Willis: I am?

MZBFM: Yes. ***BELLWETHER*** *is on it.*

Connie Willis: Oh great! I haven't seen the ballot yet.

Is this becoming old hat to you?

No. Never. Never. Never old hat. No. [laughs] I will say that I probably don't lie awake nights as much worrying about it, but I think it's always so tremendously flattering. Writers don't get much direct feedback. It's not like being a performer when people applaud and throw flowers. You're kind of working in isolation and it's really neat to realize that other people like your work. I'm excited about that. I didn't know I was on the ballot again.

Do you still hold the record for more Hugos and Nebulas than anyone else?

Well, it's my understanding that I have more Nebulas than anyone and that I have more Hugos than anyone in the writing categories. Of course Gardner Dozois has about a million Hugos in the editing categories, and Harlan has things in screen writing. Charlie Brown has a zillion for *Locus*, so I obviously don't have the most Hugos, but I think I have the most Hugos for the four writing categories.

Short story, novella, novelette, and novel.

Yeah. But that could change at any moment. Actually, I also have all these extra Hugos and Nebulas. It's great! People will say in various introductions and bibliographies that I won the Nebula for this or for that, and I didn't.

Virtual Nebulas.

That's right. I get credit for things because people can't remember. You have to keep it in perspective, of course. If you ask who won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress last year, no one can remember. So it's all relative.

In your case, it's a little hard to keep track! You've said that "the short story is the heart and soul of science fiction", though you've also written a lot of novels. Can you elaborate?

I can't be consistent. I really love writing novels. I love writing short stories, too, and I intend to do more to the short stories than I have lately. For a long time there *were* no novels and everybody good was writing short stories, so you have people of the level of James Blish and Ray Bradbury and Robert Heinlein writing short stories. But now the short story is used as a springboard to the novel. People write short stories until they get their book published, and they never look back. Sometimes I think I do as well in the awards because I'm one of the few people still writing short stories in the category.

If you ask me to make a list of the twenty-five best science fiction novels, I'd have to think real hard. If you asked me to list the twenty-five best short stories, I don't think I could do it because there are so many short stories I love. It just seems to me the short story's an ideal length for science fiction because you're not building a world, you're giving a glimpse of a world, a glimpse of a situation. Things like "Flowers for Algernon", and "The Light of Other Days" and "Lot" and "The Wait". Stories like that are gems. They're just beautifully sculptured jewels. The novel never quite achieved that level of perfection, I don't think.

You've said that Heinlein is your favorite author. How do you respond to the criticism that he comes under? Do you like his later works as much as his earlier ones?

I like pre-**STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND**. Actually, it seems to me **THE MOON IS A HARSH MISTRESS** and **DOORWAY INTO SUMMER** both come after that date, but I love those, too. I like **WALDO** and **DOUBLE STAR** and some of his short pieces. The later novels ... I don't know. I think the editorial aspects of his writing got out of control or something.

His later work still has flashes. I remember reading **JOB** and being wildly irritated with a great deal of what he was doing. But then I realized that he was playing tricks on us. I had thought all along we were operating in the world that we were familiar with, but no — we were in an alternate universe, and I thought, "Oh, that's vintage Heinlein. That's wonderful!" So I think there were flashes of brilliance in his later novels, but he got so obsessed with his sexual and political ideas.

They say that hiding under ever writer is a crank who writes letters to the editor. And I feel this very strongly in

myself. I try to keep this very firmly under control when I'm writing. Every once in a while in a book like **BELLWETHER** I'll let it all out and you'll find out everything I'm irritated about. But I try not to let it turn into a rant.

What I loved about Heinlein's earlier work was — well, just thousands of things. I loved that his heroes were smart. I'd never run into smart heroes before, except in Jane Austen. And I loved the humor because the juveniles are very funny. **HAVE SPACESUIT, WILL TRAVEL** and **THE STARBEAST** are really funny books. I love the way his plots twist and turn. He never went for the obvious. In a book like **TIME FOR THE STARS**, every other writer would have the hero, the viewpoint character, picked to go into space. But instead he throws you for a loop because the brother gets picked. And then the hero's so resentful and wishes he could go and then at the last minute the brother gets hurt and can't go and the main character gets to go. Heinlein never does the obvious. He keeps you guessing, and I love that.

He loved science. He was interested in things. He knew how to write a used and bunged-up universe that people actually lived in, instead of these shiny metal universes that everybody else was writing about. When I saw ***STAR WARS*** and got to the part where we saw Luke's beat-up speeder, I thought, "This is Heinlein. We're in Heinlein territory now." I think that movie has a heavy Heinlein influence, as does every writer working today.

I feel bad about one thing. I was on a panel yesterday and this young writer from Clarion said that she can't see what we all see in Heinlein. I think there might be a generational thing there, because he certainly had a powerful effect on me.

You're teaching at Clarion this summer.

I am! I'm teaching at Clarion West. This is my fifth time, I think. You go for a week and don't sleep and have your brain sucked out by the little vampires and then come home. I love it, but it's such hard work.

I feel such a tremendous sense of responsibility because I'm there to teach them how to do stuff, and they're there to find out if they're writers, and we're at cross-purposes. I can't tell them if they're writers. I can only tell them how to do dialogue and transitions and past perfect flashbacks.

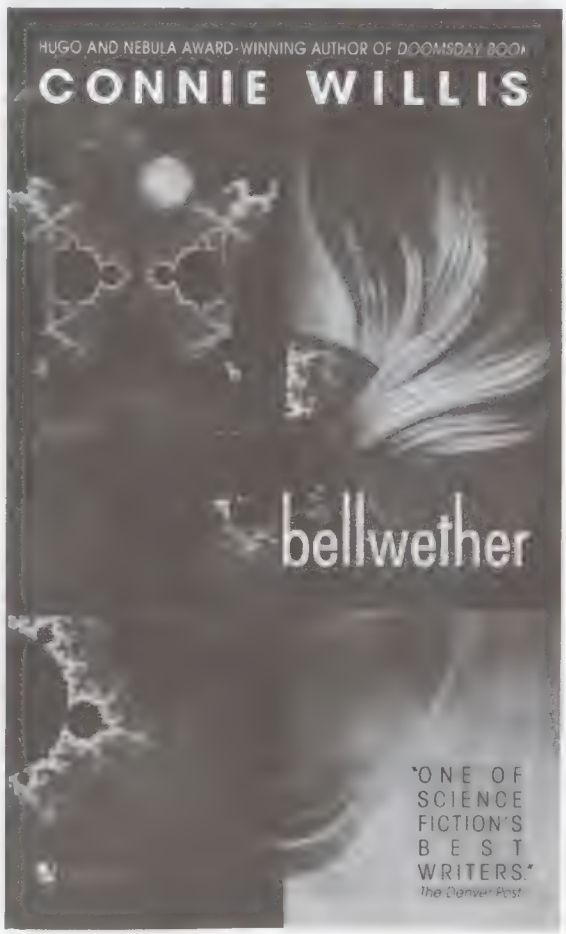
When I first found out about Clarion, I was already past it. I was in a writer's workshop and I was already selling. I even asked, "Should I go to Clarion?" and they all said, "Nah." I think I would've flunked Clarion, though, because I don't write fast at all. At Clarion you're required to write under pressure and produce new stories once a week, and that probably would have killed me. So I'm kind of glad I didn't go. It's easier to teach. [laughs]

You left a teaching career to stay home with your children and to write.

Yeah. It wasn't much of a teaching career. I'd only taught for two years.

Do you miss teaching?

Not much. I get to teach writing and stuff. Sometimes I do miss it because I really love kids, and I don't like the fact that I'm not around children right now. When I had my daughter it was okay, because there were kids around constantly. I miss teaching a little bit. I do get opportunities. I was an artist-in-residence in Colorado where I went into the schools and taught writing in two-week stretches. And I get to teach Clarion. I enjoy that.


HUGO AND NEBULA AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF DOOMSDAY BOOK
CONNIE WILLIS
bellwether
"ONE OF SCIENCE FICTION'S BEST WRITERS."
The Denver Post

How did you get any writing done with a baby in the house?

I didn't. I wrote a story when Cordelia was about two weeks old because you have a lot of time when they're first born — they sleep all the time. I learned to work in very little tiny snatches two minutes here, ten minutes there. I knew I couldn't write an entire scene, but I could write some dialogue or a few lines of description during a period like that. I got to where I could write in very fragmented ways.

I do, though, remember vividly when I was trying to finish **FIRE WATCH**, the novelette, and I was trying to get the ending right. I was really on a roll, but it was a Sunday and everyone was on top of me, including the dog and the cat. Everybody wants you. I didn't want to stop and save it for later, but I also couldn't work under those conditions. So I went out to the driveway and hid in the car. Kind of a low point in my career. [laughs] But children do grow up. They do.

I think people make the mistake of trying to wait until they have a whole day or a three-hour stretch. It dawned on me real early that I was never going to get that, and if I didn't take advantage of the fifteen minutes while I was waiting in the orthodontist's office or the fifteen minutes in the car waiting outside for my daughter to come out from school that I was never going to get anything done. So I started carrying this notebook attached to me at all times, and that worked better. But until my daughter went to school, I didn't get very much done. I hate to say this to people because it's discouraging, but there it is.

We always see sports players who have accidents that end their careers, and I believe a lot of writers think, "Whew! I'm glad I don't do something that depends on my body." But when Marion Bradley had a stroke, you started thinking along rather different lines.

Yeah. I worry a lot about this. To me, the worst thing that can happen to you is to not be able to write anymore. I remember reading about H.L. Mencken. He had an aphasic stroke, which meant he could not ever read or write again. He could speak, although he had trouble remembering some

words, and he could function as a person. He was himself. But written words made no sense to him anymore.

One time he was walking with Alistair Cooke and they were arguing over when something had happened, whether it was 1942 or 1946. He said, "No, it was 1948 — the same year I died." I always thought that was so sad because it's true. He was still himself, but he'd lost this huge part of himself.

I talked in a *Locus* interview about how I had these three novels I wanted to write but then I thought I'd probably be too old and start losing my focus for novels because I write such complicated ones. So I'd have to go back to writing short stories and then possibly end up with haiku or something really, really short, something that would fit my attention span. [laughs]

Everyone just has totally jumped on me completely over this, that it's a very nihilistic way of looking at things and a very defeatist attitude. You know — "Oh, you'll be writing when you're ninety." I think they're crazy! Each time I want to make sure I'm writing what I love in case I run out of time. It's possible to run out of time and not be able to do what you want. So I want to make sure that I like whatever I'm working on and not putting anything off.

Your first sale was "The Secret of Santa Titicaca" to ***Worlds of Fantasy****, which is now defunct.*

[laughs] I think that was the last issue. I helped kill *Worlds of Fantasy*.

I've never seen this story anthologized. Why not?

That's good! There are about four copies of it floating around and I'm trying to buy them up so that they'll disappear. I mean, it was a story about sentient Inca frogs. What can I say?

But ***Worlds*** *still bought it.*

They bought it, and Gardner Dozois is the one who bought it. Later, this was the story that got me thrown off the John W. Campbell ballot. I was up for that award in 1980 and you have to have your first sale no more than two years previously. They found out that I had this story. I didn't lie about it. They just called and said, "You didn't happen to write this story, did you?" "Yeah," I said. "I did." They said, "Well, you're off the ballot."

Actually, this story was wonderful because it helped keep me going at a time when I was really discouraged. It took me eight years to break in. The fact that I had made one sale made me think I might have another. It's not a very good story. I was still learning how to write. I think it has little flashes of interesting stuff, but my early stories weren't any good, so that's why they didn't sell.

Do you think "Santa Titicaca" would sell now? Say, if your name weren't on it?

If my — no. No. I would — no. I would say no. A definite no. [laughs] I'm trying to think of some redeeming quality that might make it sell, but no, definitely not.

What was your reaction to your first science fiction sale? Not in the confessions stories that you started with, but science fiction.

My goal all along was to break into science fiction and I was selling confessions because I needed the money and I wanted to write something I could sell. It was either substitute teach or write these stories. This way I'd sell a story and we'd have enough money to pay the insurance policy or something, and it really helped keep us going. My goal in life is to not have to go back to work because I wanted to break in real bad. And it's hard, you know, to do without two incomes. But my goal was to always write science fiction.

Actually, I was always worried that my first story was a fluke, that they didn't mean to buy it, that I'd never sell again. I can always manage to convince myself that they sent the letter and the check to the wrong person. I tend to be a really neurotic writer. I guess it was probably the second story, when I started selling to *Galileo*, that really convinced me that I was going to be able to sell stories. I had had a lot of encouragement in workshops before that, but I still needed that validation. And I was so lucky because *Galileo* was a great magazine and Charlie Ryan was a wonderful editor. He was very helpful to new writers. I still, though, think it's all a fluke. I worry that it's all a trick.

Like winning the Nebulas and Hugos.

They're going to make me give them all back. "Ha ha! We were just kidding!"

I've heard people say that writing fantasy is easier than writing science fiction because you don't have to do as much research. Your comment?

I've heard this. I don't think anything is easy to write. It's all hard. I don't think people realize what research is anyway. If there's a story with chaos theory, then they know that you did research on chaos theory. But they don't also know that you had to get a map of Phoenix and look up street numbers and names. They never notice that kind of research — they only notice the real flashy research.

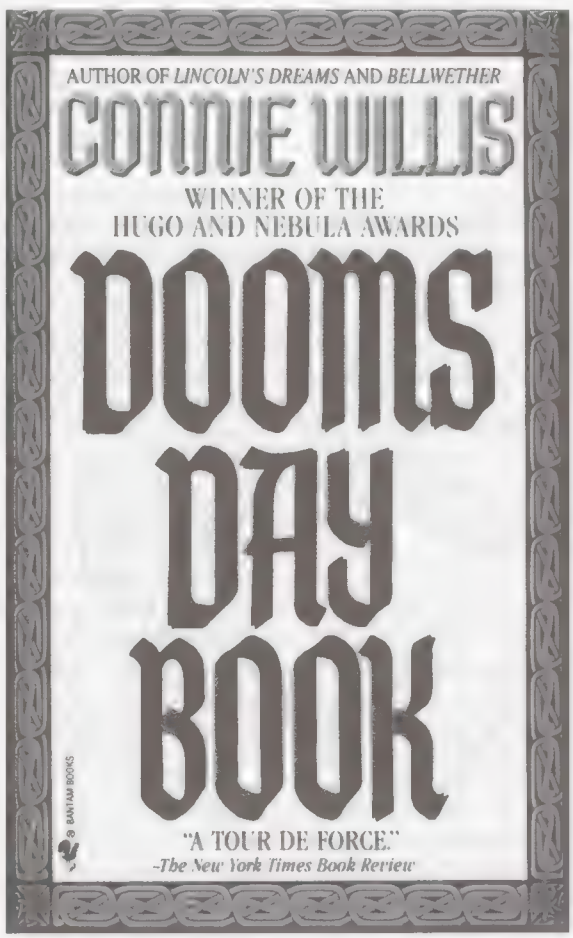
With my time travel novels, they're always saying, "Gosh, you must have done a lot research on Victorian England or the Middle Ages," which is true, I do. But I also had to look up the rules to croquet and how many steps there are to the door in the south side of Coventry Cathedral, details that nobody thinks you're doing. The same thing is true about fantasy. You have to look up all kinds of things in your research.

In fantasy you have to come up with an entirely consistent world. I've written some fantasy, not a lot. **LINCOLN'S DREAMS** I consider to be a classic ghost story. In that, of course, I did a lot of research about the Civil War, but I also tried to create an internally consistent world in which dreams play a particular role.

People would love to find something where they can just mess around and not have any internal consistency, and some people think fantasy is that place, but it's obviously not. There is no such place. Fantasy writers work just as hard as science fiction writers. It's just a different kind of thing.

*Did your research for **LINCOLN'S DREAMS** parallel what Jeff goes through as a researcher in the book?*

Actually, I did this terrible thing, an awful, awful thing in **LINCOLN'S DREAMS**. You should never, ever do this. I knew that Willie Lincoln died in 1862 or 1863, and then I was reading about Lincoln's body being taken back to Illinois after he was shot. It said that on the funeral train there was his casket and Willie's casket. I thought, "Oh, okay. So Willie's buried in Illinois now. So where was he buried for the three years before that?" Instead of finding out where it was, I thought, "How neat! They don't know where Willie was! I can use this." In the book, one of the themes is not knowing what happened to people and not knowing what happened to soldiers who were killed in the battles and not knowing what happened to this cat that wandered off. I thought, "This'll be great. I'll just stick in the book that they don't know."



That was great, except that in the end I actually had to know what happened to Willie's body, and I still didn't know. I kept thinking, "I'll find it somewhere. They *have* to know where he was. They couldn't have propped him up in the East Room for three years." And I couldn't find it. The end of the book got closer and closer and the deadline drew near and I still didn't know where he was. I looked and looked and looked and I began to just despair. The problem was that every time someone said where he was, they said, "Illinois", which is where he was finally buried. They wouldn't say where he was for those three years.

I finally did find it, but it was close. Never do that! Never, never have a book revolve around a fact that you haven't located yet. I was just about to go to Washington and start digging up people to find him myself.

*What were some of your favorite sources for **THE DOOMSDAY BOOK**?*

I used a variety of things. Everyone asks me if I used Barbara Tuchland's **A DISTANT MIRROR**, a very popular book about the fourteenth century, but I didn't use it at all. I was really attracted by two books about the Black Death, both called **THE BLACK DEATH**.

The problem was that I knew nothing about the Middle Ages — nothing! I didn't know enough to write even a scene. For example, there's one scene where everyone's at dinner. Where do people eat dinner? What do they eat? Do the men eat with the women? Who talks to whom? Where do they sit? Do the kids get to eat with the rest of the family or do they eat someplace else? Does the priest eat with the family and is he allowed to talk to them? What are they allowed to say? You can't construct a scene when you don't know any of that stuff, so I had to do a lot of research about basic life in the middle ages.

My bible for **DOOMSDAY**, however, was **KRISTIN LAVRANSDATTER** by Sigrid Undset, who won the Nobel Prize. It's wonderful. It's set in Norway in the Middle Ages and although it's wrong for England, she makes the people totally understandable in modern terms, yet also makes them consistent with the Middle Ages. They are people of their own time, not modern people dressed up in costumes. She really captures what their lives felt like. Like I said, I couldn't really use any of the details — it was the wrong country — but I could use the feel of it and try to capture that feel. She was really, really useful.

Where did you get the snippets of Middle English dialogue?

Chaucer. I did use a variety of sources, including medieval dictionaries and things, but I had a side-by-side Chaucer translation and I searched through it until I could find a sentence like the one I wanted. I hate to admit it, but I don't know any Middle English. [laughs] It was a trick! It was all a trick! I did check it with a couple of people to make sure I had it right, though.

My theories about why everything was pronounced differently I based on linguistics classes that I'd had. I remember being in college Chaucer classes and people saying, "This is how it's pronounced: *Whan that aprill with his shoures soote*," and me thinking, "How do we know that? We have no idea. We think that's how it was pronounced, but we really don't know." I was very taken with the idea that we have no idea how everything was pronounced and if someone went back, he'd be lost.

*Which is why you needed the translator in **THE DOOMSDAY BOOK**.*

Exactly. I hate time travel books where the person goes back to 18th century Germany and starts speaking like a native. I have trouble in the South! I remember the first time I was in England, my friends and I were looking for the Tower of London. We couldn't find it. We knew we were in the general area, but we didn't know where it was. So I went over to a bobby and he gave me directions. I went back to my friends. They said, "Well? What'd he say?" I said, "I have no idea. I believe he was speaking our native tongue, but I have no idea." So the chances that someone could go to another *century* and understand everybody immediately would be nil.

*One cover of **THE DOOMSDAY BOOK** —*

— is really terrible.

The one with Gawyn on it?

I guess that's who that is.

He's a minor character, but he's prominent on the cover. I know that's not your fault, but it certainly confused me. I kept waiting for him to show up and do something.

[laughs] People are always asking me, "Who's this guy on the horse?" And I don't know! I did decide eventually that it was Gawyn.

The Stars My Destination, which is a bookstore in Chicago, put a paper cover on the book and displayed a sign that said something like, "Great book, bad cover." So many booksellers complained about that cover.

I asked the publishers about it, and they said, "We're trying to go for the romance angle," and I said, "It's a book about the Black Death! When people in a romance start dropping like flies, don't you think the readers will get upset?" I don't know *what* they were thinking.

You collaborate with Cynthia Felice.

Yes.

What is your system for it?

We like to tell people that I write the nouns and verbs and she writes the adjectives and adverbs, but that of course is not true. The plan is we get together for a weekend. Our families are friends and have been friends together, so this is a social event for them, too. We get together and we brainstorm a plot. Sometimes it takes a couple of weekends to do this. I'll say that I'd like to set it on a Waterworld kind of planet, only do it right — that's our new book. We talk about some of the possibilities and try to come up with the main characters so we can get started.

When we get to a certain point, one of us volunteers to write chapter one. Then the other one writes chapter two and fixes chapter one. Then the other one writes chapter three and fixes the previous two chapters. By this time, we're completely off the rail. So then we get together for another weekend and decide whether we want to go off in this new direction or we want to rethink the whole shebang. Then we start again. We do that probably one more time, and by about the middle of the book, we're on track and we know where we're going. It's fun!

I've heard it said that collaborations are twice the work for half the money. Do you agree?

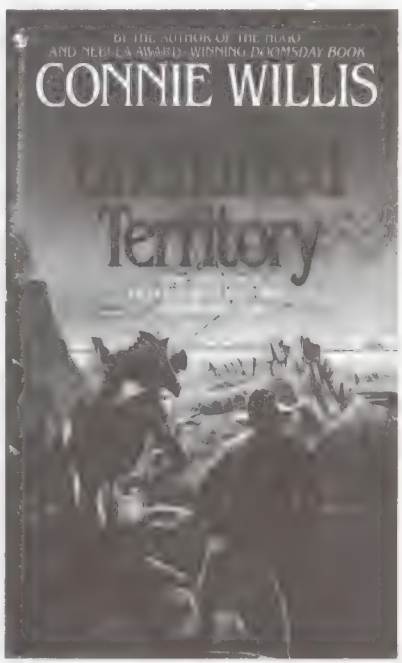
Oh, I don't know. In some ways, it's a tremendous relief. One of the worst things about writing a novel is that you're never done. It's like having homework all your life. You could put in a tremendously productive week and write a whole chapter, but you still have all these other chapters to write, so there's never any sense of accomplishment or finish. This is why so many writers stop in the middle of a novel to write a short story, to get this feeling of completion. In our case, I do a chapter and ship it off to her, and I'm done! Until she gets the next chapter back to me, I don't have any responsibilities, and it is truly a great feeling. It's like, "Whew! That's out of my life!" And then if she takes six months to write the next chapter, great! I don't have to deal with it. So that works well.

It's also nice to have a partner when you paint yourself into a corner. If you're by yourself, it's a very lonely process. But if I paint myself into a corner, I ship it off to Cynthia and say, "I have no idea what to do. Can you think of something?" And either she'll think of something herself, which is great, or she'll call me and we'll think of something together. So I really enjoy them. We've never tried to write a serious novel, just entertainment, but we have fun and we're good friends, which is another bonus. Of course, Gilbert and Sullivan ended up not speaking to each other, but we're doing okay so far.

You seem fascinated by parallels. You use them in ***THE DOOMSDAY BOOK****, "The Last Of the Winnebagos", and "In the Late Cretaceous", to name just three. Why is this?*

I don't know. I guess it's because I'm constantly seeing connections and associations and wanting to talk about them. I see parallels everywhere, especially in history. People sometimes say to me, "Why don't you just write historical novels?" I don't understand that question because time travel novels are completely different from historicals. To me the whole point of a time travel novel is that you get to look at the past from the point of view of the natives, plus the point of view looking back at it from the present, which is a whole different perspective. Then the readers have the advantage of looking at these two societies side by side and drawing their own conclusions about the parallels, which probably neither set of characters understands completely. You get three versions of the truth, and I think that's just very interesting.

I got very angry at people who have a very superior attitude toward people of the Middle Ages. "Oh, they were fools. They had this faith in God and they didn't know anything about medicine or science and they were idiots." Who's the idiot here? The person who puts all his faith in this technology which could let him down, or the person who puts his faith in forces beyond his control? I wanted people to look at both societies and get some new insights both about the past and about the present.



I love writing time travel and I love drawing parallels. Of course, history is my big thing and I see connections everywhere. I'm just fascinated by that whole thing right now — the Clinton scandal with Monica Lewinski.

It's so interesting to me because I'm remembering Watergate and I'm seeing how it's different, how it's the same, how we've been through this before, how things have changed. I'm just fascinated by all those ramifications.

Lewinski, I think, was housed at the Watergate Hotel for a while.

Yes! I just love that. I was just thinking, "Oh my God!"

And not one newscaster I saw commented on the irony.

I know! Here we go again — it's Watergate. Watergate is permeating our society.

It seems to be a rite of passage for speculative fiction writers to sell a dragon or a vampire story. You sold the latter.

I did. "Jack" was my vampire story. I've never done a dragon story. Oh no — wait, wait — I did do a dragon story, a long time ago. It was called "Circus Story". It appeared in *Aboriginal*. It was about a dragon that worked in a circus. Yeah! And the girl was in telepathic contact with the dragon. That's how they did their act.

So you've done both after all.

Yeah, I guess I have.

What was the genesis of the story "Jack" and did you have a hard time selling it? Vampires and dragons are tough sales.

They are. I always said I would never write a vampire story because I felt that everything to be said had been said. **INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE** dealt with the sexual aspects of vampirism and **DRACULA** dealt with the technology vs. superstition aspect, and I didn't really have anything to say about vampires. But while I was working on "Fire Watch" and doing research on the Blitz, I found there was such a thing as people called body sniffers. They were very good at digging people out of the rubble. They seemed to have an uncanny sense of where people were and they could literally point at a place in the ground and say, "There's somebody down there, and they're still alive." They had a pretty good track record. Several body sniffers were really good and they were hired by other rescue crews to go around London and work for them.

I wondered how body sniffing worked. I thought maybe body sniffers had acute hearing and they could actually hear cries better than anybody else because so many people had damaged hearing from the bombing. And then I thought maybe there were so many bodies buried, if you guessed right twice, you'd be an expert. I still think that's probably it. But then I also thought if you were a vampire, you could smell the blood and you would be able to find them.

I thought, "A vampire in the Blitz. How interesting!" First, London was really dark again. And nobody would notice another body or another person who had bled to death because they were all over the place. I got to thinking about the implications of what it would be like to be a minor monster at a time when major monsters were loose on the world. I had some interesting ideas and I thought it would be a story.

I tried various things and finally decided I was interested in the idea of a vampire who might want redemption, who might hate what he was and welcome a chance to be useful, to be a good person. Being a rescue worker might provide that chance, and I was very interested in that whole idea. So then I finally had something to say about vampires! But I think "Jack" sold because of the Blitz, not the vampires. The Blitz is always a very interesting setting for stories. I don't know why the one about the dragon in the circus sold.

I died laughing at "Even the Queen". Did you set out to write humorous sf or did it just happen?

Well, some of my early stuff was humorous. I'd always been very interested in comedy. Even when I was writing confessions, some of my them were comic, and there aren't very many comic confessions. I did one about a grandmother living in a retirement community and her grandkids decide she needs a boyfriend. They set out to get her one and do all these really obnoxious things that make her life miserable. That one was really fun to write. I think I'm a naturally comic writer, and that was just sort of my natural bent.

Do you have any writing rituals? Particular music you listen to? A dog at your feet?

I start at Margie's Java Joint in the morning, have a decaf cafe latte, discuss O.J. Simpson and the Jon-Benet Ramsey case for fifteen minutes with the ladies behind the counter — we know everything there is to know about these things — and then start writing. After a while I move on to the library. I do a lot of my work at the library because the research is all right there and I can look up thousands of things if I need to.

I write with a blue 20-cent Kinko's pen on Red Chief tablets. I handwrite all my novels. I handwrite everything. And then I put it on computer, of course. Actually, I have a secretary who helps me put it on computer because I generate these huge masses of material.

I like composing longhand. It's how I learned to write. I learned it in these little intervals at the orthodontist or waiting to pick my daughter up from school, like I mentioned earlier. I'm real comfortable writing longhand. I don't want to hear you can make a little window and you can do double files and all this stuff. I just like working on Red Chief tablets. It works for me. I can't type on a computer any faster than I can write when I'm composing anyway, so since I'm going that slowly, it gives me absolute freedom to write anyplace.

Octavia Butler explored the Amazon. Marion Bradley worked for a carnival. Isaac Asimov was a research scientist. Famous anthropologists paraded through Ursula LeGuin's living room when she was a child. You go to Tupperware parties and choir practice. What's it like being a rebel among the speculative fiction crowd?

[laughs] There are so many people who say I can't be a science fiction writer because I've never done anything bizarre, and I say there's nothing more bizarre than going to a Tupperware party.

I grew up in the weird world of suburbia. There was one point where everybody was going to these — I think they were called Color Me Beautiful parties, where you had your colors done. They would tie little swatches of color around your neck and tell you which colors you could wear. I had a

friend who discarded her entire wardrobe because she had been told she shouldn't wear these colors anymore. I thought, "Oh my God, it doesn't get more peculiar than this."

I feel like writers are supposed to be hard, cutting edge, but Shakespeare grew up in Stratford-upon-Avon, which was a really dumpy town. Everybody always wonders how he could have constructed all these characters because they can't believe Shakespeare came from this dumpy town. The truth is, everything you need is right there, you know? Some of my best material comes from the parking authority on campus — nothing gets weirder than the parking authority — and watching people at cocktail parties do their strange little party dances, jockeying for power. And of course choir practice is a world apart. I think I fit right in.

I've had to battle. People don't take you seriously if you're a housewife. They never have. So you find yourself in the place of Miss Marple and every once in a while I feel like I have to write something like "All My Darling Daughters" or "Even the Queen" to shake people up and make them pay attention. Then I go back to being harmless again. I like people to think I'm harmless. It gives you a tactical advantage. They underestimate you, just like they underestimated Miss Marple.

Thank you, Connie Willis.

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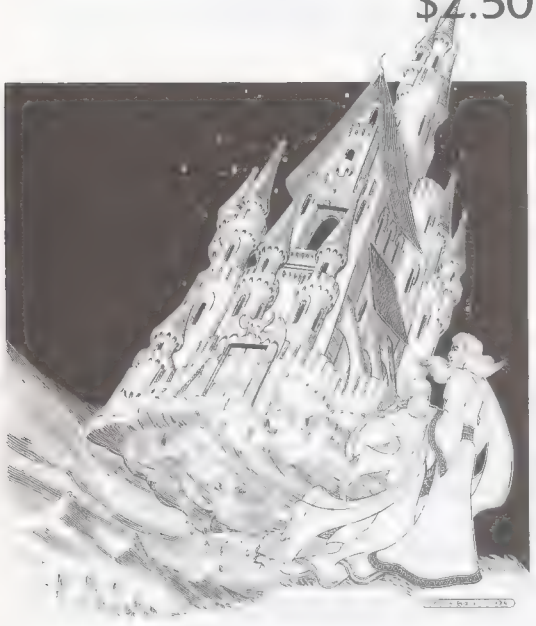

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WRITERS TALK BACK:

Beyond the Fields We Know

or, What to do if you write a story that's not sf (with notes on the importance of reading the fields you think you know)

by Lawrence Schimel

I am making an assumption, for the sake of this article, that you currently write or aspire to write fantasy and science fiction, primarily if not exclusively. To that extent, you are familiar with, or are in the process of learning, the myriad of markets — professional, semi-professional, and amateur — that publish science fiction stories and novels.

But what happens if you accidentally write a story with no genre elements whatsoever, if an idea grabs hold of you and won't let go? Or perhaps you'd like to take a break from mining the same imaginative fields, or you're eager to explore another genre that you like to read — mystery, romance, whatever.

This article will not be a catalogue of "hot" non-genre markets to try, *à la* the *WRITER'S DIGEST FICTION 50* list. Instead, it details a strategy toward finding and evaluating markets, which will prove more valuable over time.

(Incidentally, I recommend that all regular freelancers look at the *WRITER'S DIGEST FICTION 50* list, to familiarize yourself with those markets which will be inundated with inappropriate submissions in the immediate future. When approaching these markets in particular it is important to have done your homework, and for this to be reflected in the work you're submitting, to help you stand out from the press and crush of slush. It is worthwhile to perhaps glance at the markets listed in *Writer's Digest* each issue, for markets to steer clear of for a few months. *WD* caters primarily to the Great Unwashed, people with more aspiration to write than, necessarily, inspiration, or a dedication to craft. The glamour of being published is the siren's call they're chasing. *WD* might bring to your attention a valid market for your work, but chances are your work will be lost in the floods if you submit immediately following an announcement — unless it's a time-sensitive market like an anthology. Holding off until all that slush has been rejected will give you time to actually check out the magazine, too.)

I am of the opinion that it is healthiest for any writer to read widely, across many genres, instead of merely the area in which one is working. Variety, as they say, is the spice of life. Reading outside the area you're working will give you perspective, and may very well give you some new ideas and teach you some new narrative tricks that you might want to coopt for your own work.

A corollary to this belief is that writers should write in more than just one genre. Which is not as simple a process as it might at first seem.

I am a professional writer, with no source of income aside from my writing and editing. I do not have time to write material that I will not publish somewhere. Usually, I need to sell these pieces for money, but I am also planning a career, over the long haul, and the highest bidder is not always the best market for my work. Sometimes I will even get more exposure from giving a piece away for free. (For instance, a benefit project whose money is being donated to a charity, such as my recent cookbook, **FOOD FOR LIFE AND OTHER DISH**, which features celebrity recipes from Martina Navratilova, RuPaul, Tony Kushner, and others, and whose royalties are donated to regional organizations that provide food to homebound people with AIDS.)

Because I am constantly under self-imposed pressure to produce material, as well as working under a never-ending barrage of deadlines, I find it essential to jump around, in genres and media, just to keep myself entertained, and to prevent burnout from exhaustion. If I'm stuck on a work of fiction, I can switch to the personal essay I have due, or my column on writing poetry, or even turn the computer off altogether and read a novel I'm supposed to write a review of by the following Monday... I can think — and write — in a different method, and hopefully jump-start my writing energies again. Anything that helps keep me from staring at a blank screen for too long is a worthwhile distraction, even if I do have to write something that's not immediately due and maybe even can never be sold.

(The one thing I try not to do too much is write e-mails or letters, as it's quite easy to type oneself silly in this fashion and "use up" all one's words for the day. If I've just typed a few thousand words of email, I'm no longer in the mood to continue sitting at the keyboard typing fiction, I'm all typed out for the day.)

It's not always necessary for me to jump media, however; oftentimes, especially if I'm stuck writing a piece of high fantasy, what I need is to write something with a contemporary setting. Because these details are more immediate, I can steal from my own life and environs, and get the ball writing, writing about things which are familiar.

Of course, I'm then left with the question of what to do

with these contemporary stories I'm distracting myself with.

Before writing something outside of my primary genres — one of which is sf — I tend to have investigated the available markets. I am a market junkie. I like to know about markets, even if I never intend to send anything to them. Even with markets I *cannot* send work to, falling outside of their contributor profile — for instance, magazines and anthologies which focus only on work by writers of a particular race or gender — I still want to know about them.

Why bother, you might ask? One reason is because I pass this information along to other writers. This is done with two intentions: the first is pure altruism, the same instinct which leads me to edit so many anthologies, and to work with and nurture newer writers, "paying back", in a way, the help I'd been given. I have lots of friends who are writers, and I like helping the people whose work I like to find more outlets for their work and hopefully attract more notice and attention for them. The second reason is that I hope these writer-friends of mine will do the same for me, pointing out markets I may not've otherwise seen.

Which leads to the all-important question: where do you find markets?

Admittedly, I live in Manhattan, the cradle of publishing and a major cosmopolitan city, with many resources at its disposal. This city is littered with major periodicals purveyors, who stock magazines and newspapers from around the country and around the globe, catering primarily for the innumerable tourists who visit NYC (and those native New Yorkers who're planning trips elsewhere).

A major, often-overlooked area, is in your own backyard. Many local publications will run fiction that is set in the region, especially if it is concerned with recognizable local events and situations. If, like me, you're writing contemporary, local fiction as a distraction from some of your other work, these make ideal markets.

There is often prejudice against non-national markets, an assumption that a regional audience is inherently "inferior" (otherwise it would've gone to a national market) or smaller. Which is simply not the case. Quite often, you can find a larger readership in a regional publication. A major metropolitan newspaper like *The Tampa Tribune*, which publishes a quarterly fiction supplement I've written for, has a circulation of over 300,000 copies — greater than *MZBFM* or *Asimov's* or *F&SF*. And a glance at some of the city-specific regional newsmagazines like *Bostonia*, *Philadelphia*, etc., will reveal such literary lions as Saul Bellow and Nadine Gordimer, as well as lesser-known local authors.

I will presume, also, if you're reading this column, that your intention is to write, and that at some point you will have books. I am exclusively a short form writer, at this point in my career — I don't write novels or booklength nonfiction. I have, however, sold short story collections and anthologies, which I am trying to promote.

It can be quite beneficial to cultivate a loyal readership in a particular region (especially one close to where you live) by appearing regularly in local publications. Especially when you have a book on the stands to flog. It can be a tremendous boost to your sales to have your byline appear regularly before a particular audience, especially if you can get a bio publicizing your most recent book included after each article or story. Even regional magazines that pay only $15 or $25 a piece can be worth your time, in the long run; that regular loyal audience can add up to books sold, not to mention a strong relationship with an editor that'll help your book get reviewed. (Useful not merely for bringing more readers to your work, but also for subsidiary sales, and general prestige which makes your *next* book more valuable.)

I pay attention to those magazines which do review my books. Not merely because I will want them to review my next books, but because those editors will already be familiar with my work, and if the review was positive, presumably they'd be receptive to working with me directly, to publish original fiction or articles by me instead of only piece about me.

I also travel widely publicizing my books, doing readings and signings in bookstores across the country, speaking at Universities, and the like. I am constantly picking up all of the free weekly papers and scanning them, making a note of those that use fiction, those that run reviews of books similar to mine, and so forth. I always clip the mastheads of these papers, even if I don't, in the end, bring the papers themselves home with me. Editorial staffs change so rapidly, many guidebook listings are long out of date.

When I travel, I also look at what magazines these cities have that I don't find at home. When I'm in California, I find very different magazines on the general newsstands than the ones that are carried by the East Coast kiosks I'm most familiar with. I buy interesting prospects — tax-deductible as legitimate market research.

I put a lot of effort into research potential markets, into familiarizing myself with the marketplace at large. It helps that I'm also a sometime bookseller, and so I'm familiar with some titles that way. I'm also the co-chair of a national writers organization, and encounter numerous magazines as they write up articles on our various events, or contact me as a source for articles about the state of publishing. Many of our members are editors at various periodicals, and because of the anthologies I edit, I hear from many different writers on an almost daily basis, and we often kibitz about our experiences with different venues, and give suggestions. So a lot of market information filters through me.

This is the position I prefer to be in. In many ways, even though I am primarily a fiction writer, I operate like a journalist. I know what my market is before I write a piece, and I target my fiction directly for this audience. Because for me, writing is communication, and having a concrete audience lets me know who I'm communicating with. I do not write for posterity, for an amorphous and ambiguous possible acclaim or reputation, for the myth of Literature. I write to have an impact on people: to entertain, to amuse, to enlighten, to arouse. I always have some audience in mind, much like an actor, who might rehearse in private, but whose performance is an engagement with an audience, of whatever size. And oftentimes, especially when writing for theme anthologies, one can play with the audiences' expectations, subvert them, since they know each story in a theme anthology will involve, in some way, the theme; I like to surprise the reader with how I use the theme they know must be there.

I also hate being in the position of having written something and not knowing what to do with it.

Many genre writers that I know will hear about some non-genre markets in their online communities, in the market newsletters like *The Gila Queen's Guide to the Markets* or *Scavenger's Newsletter*, in guidebooks like **WRITER'S MARKET**, or similar venues. I am constantly amazed to listen to

people waste both their own postage and time, not to mention the effort of the editor to whom they're submitting, by sending out stories with no familiarity about the markets they're submitting to. You would not (presumably) buy stocks without first investigating the company, and you should treat markets with the same degree of skepticism. (And if you would buy stock without first investigating, I've a bridge you might be interested in buying...)

All non-genre markets were not created equal, and you can't simply send your one mainstream short story to any non-genre market just because it's a non-genre market.

(Well, you can, and you might even get lucky and make a sale, but you're essentially gambling blind, without knowing the odds or even which horse you've bet on.)

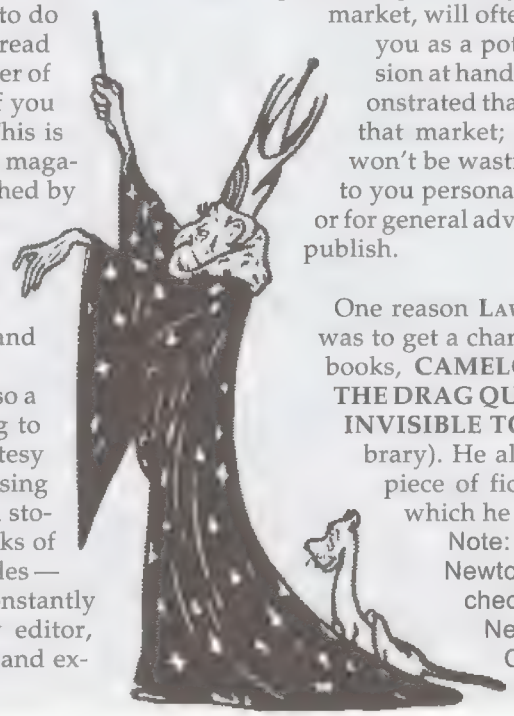
People who practice this sort of blind submission process are the aforementioned Unwashed Masses who are the primary audience of *Writer's Digest*, who fall prey to the vanity press poetry anthology scams advertised in those magazines. If just seeing your name in print, regardless of the venue, is enough for you, enjoy the limelight when you find it, I hope the glory lives up to your dreams of it.

There is a wide array of non-genre markets, ranging from the magazines and newspapers which run an occasional piece of fiction to the literary magazines, often University-funded, that are entirely fiction and poetry. And the more you know about them, the better able you'll be to determine which will be the most receptive to your work. And the more you know about them before you begin writing, even, the better able you'll be to figure out what kinds of stories to write, especially if you're deciding to target some of the more specialized markets — *Llamas* magazine, for instance, which features fiction only about, unsurprisingly enough, llamas.

The fantasy and sf markets are, admittedly, a slightly different kettle of fish than many of the markets described above. These markets are less journalistically oriented in their target subject, and because they generally feature more slots for fiction they cover a broader range of stories.

The fact that they cover a broad spectrum of science fiction doesn't mean you don't need to do your homework, however. It is important to read the markets you want to submit to for a number of reasons, not the least of which is to decide if you really want to appear in this publication. (This is especially important for some of the semi-pro magazines that come and go quickly, often published by well-intentioned people with a dream and a desktop publishing system but lacking enough know-how about publishing or connections among writers to attract enough recognizable names to attract both audience and other writers.)

Reading the periodicals you submit to is also a courtesy to the editor, who you're expecting to treat your manuscript and work with courtesy and respect. Editors like discovering promising new writers, or getting to publish wonderful stories by established names. It's one of the perks of the jobs; it's why they put up with all the hassles — one being, of course, the slushpile, that constantly growing albatross around the neck of any editor, weighting him or her down with obligation and expectation.



It would be a delight if all of these manuscripts were appropriate and worthwhile. Instead, the far greater proportion of any slush pile is inappropriate submissions, which must be slogged through to find the gold among the dross — because an editor brings the same investment to each unknown manuscript, unable to determine, mystically, beforehand, which are the ones he or she wants to publish and which to reject.

Reading the markets you're submitting to will help you to not waste editors' time. Because while you might not be able to judge what an editor will buy from reading the magazine they edit, you can get an idea of the kinds of material they *won't* purchase.

Everyone knows that *Analog* is the hard science fiction magazine. Reading an issue of the magazine, however, will show you that they'll also publish some "softer" sf (Steven Gould's "Peaches for Mad Molly", for example) that would be equally at home in *Asimov's* or even *F&SF*. If you're paying attention, you'll also notice the political bent of *Analog* stories, or at least the absence of certain kinds of stories — you're not likely to find a feminist utopia in these pages, no matter how nuts and bolts sf it is.

Reading the magazine is sometimes misleading: you won't find many hard sf stories in *Asimov's* or *F&SF*, although the editors of both magazines would be happy to publish more hard sf if they could find more of it that was well-written. There're no hard sf stories in this magazine, either, and Marion isn't looking for any. At the same time, Marion's guidelines for *MZBFM* and **S&S** say no witches, dragons, unicorns, etc. and yet she will occasionally find a story with just these themes that's too good to pass up.

So sometimes it is right to break rules and send stories that differ from what a magazine has hitherto published, or which violate published market guidelines. But it's best to do so from the perspective of an educated and informed writer; you should know the rules before you break them, not simply ignore the very existence of rules.

An awareness of the kinds of stories that an editor has published previously, especially when targeting a niche market, will often make an editor pay attention to you as a potential writer, even if the submission at hand isn't quite right. You'll have demonstrated that you're in earnest about selling to that market; often, this means that an editor won't be wasting his or her time by responding to you personally with suggestions for a rewrite or for general advice about the kinds of writing they publish.

❄

One reason **Lawrence Schimel** wrote this article was to get a chance to promote some of his recent books, **CAMELOT FANTASTIC** (DAW Books), **THE DRAG QUEEN OF ELFLAND** and **THINGS INVISIBLE TO SEE** (both from Ultra Violet Library). He also needed the distraction from a piece of fiction that was being recalcitrant, which he will now return to writing.

Note: Gila Queen's Guide, P.O. Box 97, Newton NJ 07860-0097, $30/12 issues, checks to Kathryn Ptacek. Scavenger's Newsletter, 519 Ellinwood, Osage City KS 66523-1329, $19.50/yr, checks to Janet Fox.

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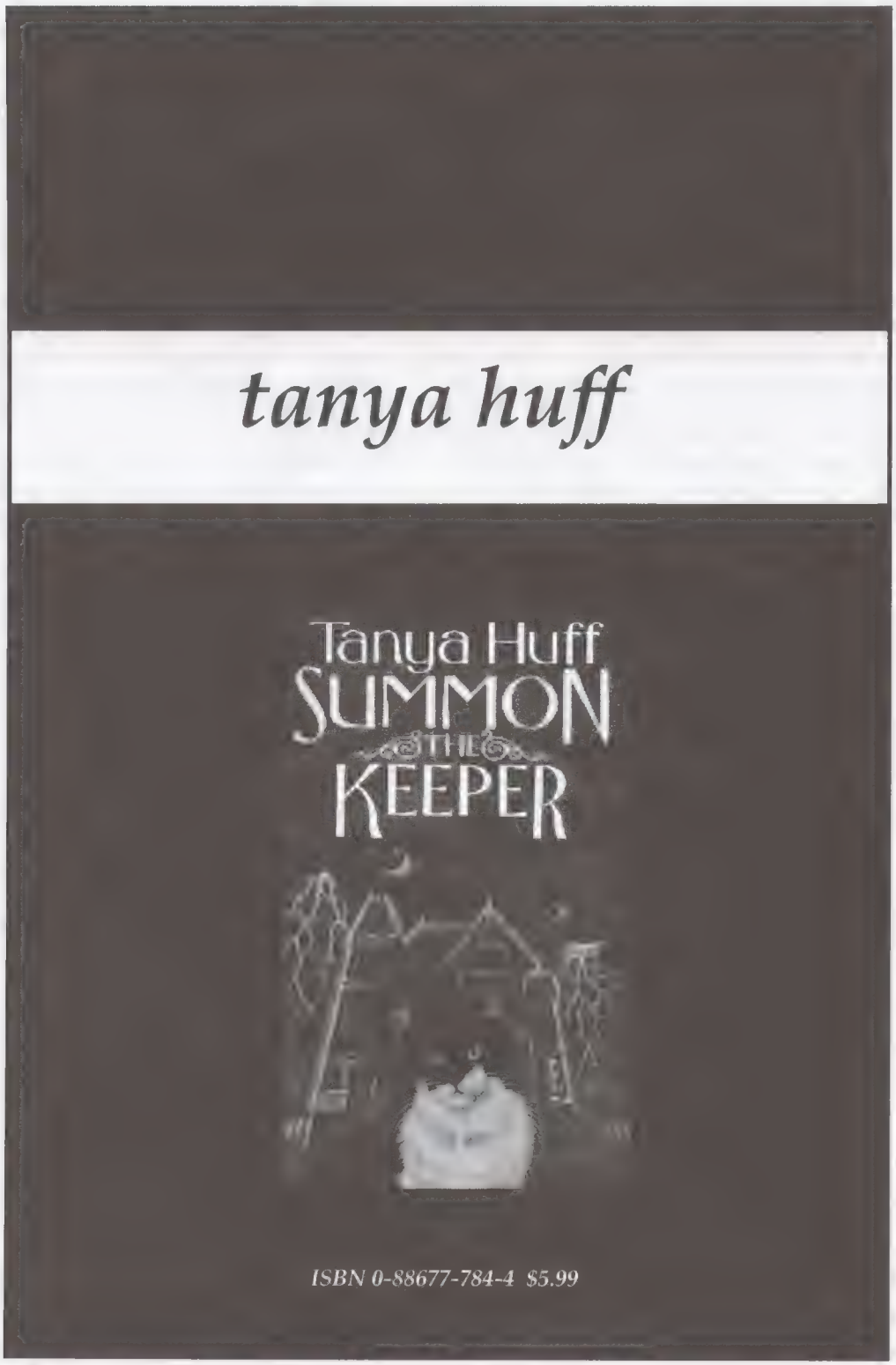

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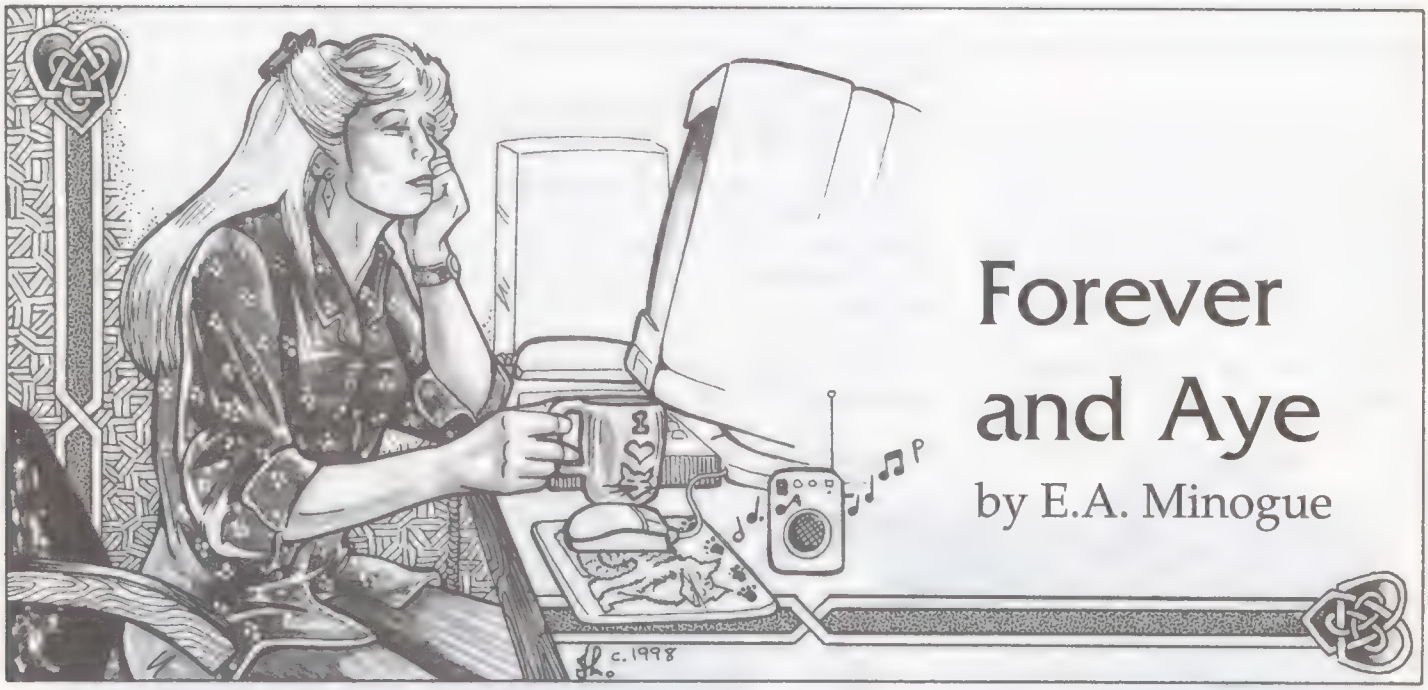

Forever and Aye

by E.A. Minogue

Three o'clock was always the worst time. Two hours to go and already yawning, no energy left to see her through the day. Sarah sighed, looking from the cursor blinking on her empty screen to the minutes of the board meeting waiting to be typed.

Five minutes more, she thought. Just until this song ends. Then I'll start. She sipped her coffee and grimaced, wondering why she bothered to drink it. It wouldn't wake her up, it never did, but still every day at three o'clock she joined the others by the machine and poured herself a cup, a mindless ritual she lacked the will to change.

The radio she kept tucked into her tiny cubicle was tuned to the University station — another old habit. The song ended and a voice announced, "This is Professor George Ingram, bringing you the historic wonders of Philadelphia. Today we have a special guest. You may have heard that the Kirallen Sword has come to the Briggs Museum and here in my studio is Lord Kirallen himself ..."

Sarah knew Professor Ingram. She'd been his graduate assistant once, before her mother's illness had made full-time work a necessity. He'd been a pompous ass then and he hadn't changed much, either. His affected, pseudo-English accent still grated on her nerves.

She'd just reached to turn it off when another voice spoke, this one straight from the Highlands. "Weel, Geordie, thank you for having me."

Sarah choked on her coffee. Geordie! She could just imagine Ingram puffing up with indignation. The professor's voice was several degrees cooler when he said, "The legend surrounding this weapon is ... interesting. But hardly original. It bears a marked resemblance to others, better known and —"

"Exactly what we thought ourselves!" his guest interrupted. "It was just a tale, you know, handed down through the years. No one believed a word of it. But then I found the sword. And so one does have to wonder."

"Why don't you tell us the story?"

"They say," Kirallen began, "that long, long years ago there was another Lord Kirallen, a warrior of some renown, who was one day stricken by an illness that could be neither named nor cured. So he lay, day after day, wasting away to nothing. And then a mysterious woman appeared and offered to make him well. But there was a price to pay — well, there always is, isn't there? She said that in return he must take a sacred vow and it was this: to give the next woman he might meet upon the road anything she asked for. Well, of course the man accepted. And so he recovered and all was well. Until one day —"

"Ms. Graham!"

Sarah started guiltily. She'd been sitting, chin cupped in her hand, half sleeping.

"Yes, Mrs. Bridge?"

"Mr. Henry is waiting for those minutes. How are they — why, you haven't even begun!"

"I'll do them right now."

"And there was a memo about radios in the cubicles. Didn't you receive it?"

"I must have forgotten," Sarah said, switching it off and turning to her computer. It was after five when she finally finished and gave the minutes to her supervisor. Mrs. Bridge accepted them with a disapproving grunt, her sharp eyes already searching for mistakes as Sarah escaped and stood uncertainly on the street.

She didn't want to go home. The apartment was so quiet now, a heavy silence emanating from the room that had once been her mother's. She decided to go see Andrew. He was a good friend, one of the few who had stood by her through the last terrible year. He'd tell her, as he always did, that she should go back to school and finish. And maybe tonight she'd allow herself to be persuaded. There was really nothing holding her to her job — nothing but a weary reluctance to make the change.

She walked to the small bookstore where Andrew worked, picking up a flyer on her way in with the words "The Kirallen Sword" hand lettered across the top. Maybe she'd convince Andrew to go and see it. She'd like to know how the story ended. She wandered through the shop, breathing sweet incense and looking curiously at the crystals, the beads and amulets and books with strange titles, some in languages she couldn't begin to identify.

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At length she walked back into a storage room and from there into the office.

"Andrew?"

There was no answer and she was about to leave when she heard voices raised in some kind of atonal song, and opening another door found a group of people sitting cross-legged in a circle around what appeared to be a game board. At her entrance the song ceased abruptly.

"Sorry," she said. "I was looking for Andrew."

"Isn't he in the store?" one of them asked, a dark-haired woman who looked vaguely familiar.

"What are you doing?" Sarah asked, stepping into the room. "Is it Dungeons and Dragons?"

"It's nothing like D&D," one of them snorted. "This is for people who —"

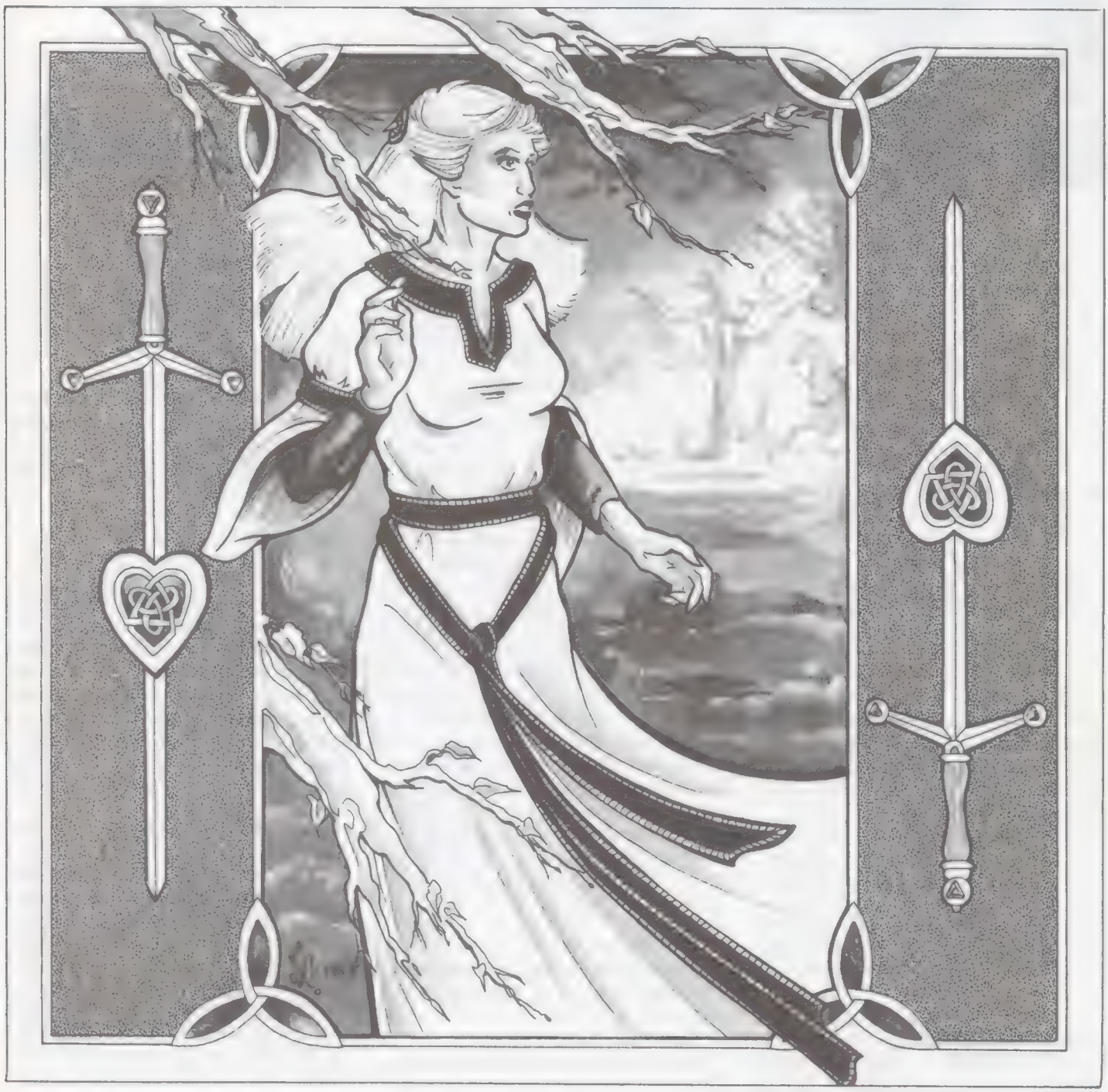
He broke off as someone elbowed him in the ribs. "It's just a game," he shrugged.

"Can I see?"

She reached for one of the figures on the board and felt her wrist seized in a firm grasp. "Sorry," the woman said. "Better not —"

But it was too late. Sarah felt herself grow dizzy, the room was suddenly dim and insubstantial. "Oh, hell," a man said, his voice coming from a great distance. "I thought that door was locked! It looks like she's going to — quick," he added urgently to Sarah, "Focus on something or you could be lost."

Sarah felt the flyer clutched in her hand. "The Kirallen Sword," she whispered. And then the room vanished



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completely.

She was standing on a fog-shrouded road in mud up to her ankles, wearing a loose dress of what felt like wool and surrounded by bare trees on either side. A bird crowed harshly from a high branch and she started at the sound. All right, she thought, struggling to stay calm. This is a dream, that's all. A strange dream. Or, she thought fearfully, maybe something happened ... an accident. She'd heard that people often didn't remember an accident. They'd say, "The last thing I remember was getting dressed and then I woke up in the hospital." The last thing she remembered was the bookstore. Would she wake in a hospital? Or would she not wake at all? She looked around, half expecting to see a tunnel filled with golden light and glorious music. Instead she saw a grey, lowering sky.

A horse came around the corner in full gallop and she instinctively threw herself to the side of the road. The rider drew up and dismounted. He was dressed in brown riding leathers, a cap on his dark hair and a green feather curling over one shoulder.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked, his accent so thick that it took Sarah a moment to understand him. Even when she did understand she didn't respond but stood staring. She guessed his age at somewhere near her own, twenty-five, and thought with some amusement that he was just the sort of man she'd choose for her dream — or whatever this was. He was quite good looking, with bright blue eyes and a flashing smile, though his face was very thin and his eyes shadowed.

"Speak up, lass."

"I — I'm all right. Thank you."

He looked at her curiously. "Are ye sure? What are you doing here alone at this hour?"

"I don't — that is, it doesn't matter — "

"I'll not be leaving you out here with darkness drawing on. 'Tisn't safe. Come up behind me and I'll get you to the village."

Not knowing what else to do, she followed him and was crimson with embarrassment by the time he'd succeeded in hauling her into the saddle. "Hold on," he said and she clutched him as the horse began to move. "Ease off a bit, lass, I canna breathe," he laughed and she loosed her hold a fraction, certain she would fall and kill herself at any moment. If such a thing was possible, she thought, confused. But looking at the ground hurrying past she decided she didn't want to put it to the test. She closed her eyes and somehow managed to keep her seat and at length they reached a few tumble-down huts by the side of the road.

"Here we are."

"This is the village?"

A solitary pig rooted in the mud, the only movement in the deserted hamlet.

"'Tisn't much, I grant you, but ..." he turned and looked at her. "Where are you bound?"

"I don't know," she said honestly. "Perhaps ... Lord Kirallen?"

"But that's myself," he answered. "For what purpose do you seek me?"

"I'm not sure. You see, it's all very strange. I come from — well, another place — or not really another place but another time — and I didn't really mean to come here at all, it just seemed to happen. And I don't know how to get back again and yours is the only name I know ..." she trailed to a stop, feeling like a complete fool.

But he was looking at her quite seriously. "I won't say I understand your words, for I don't. Yet it seems I saw you once ... or no, for she was dark and you —"

"Oh!" Sarah said. "I know who you mean. Now wait, let's see if I remember how it went. You lay between life and death and a mysterious woman appeared and said that she could heal you but you had to promise that you would give the next woman you met whatever she asked for. Is that right?" she finished with a laugh.

"Aye. And so I did. Ask what you will of me, lady, and it is yours."

"Oh, no, sir — uh, my lord — it wasn't me she meant. There's some other woman you'll be meeting and she's the one —"

He shook his head. "She said the first woman. And that would be you."

"This is all a terrible mistake," Sarah said. "Really. I'm sorry I bothered you but you can just leave me here. I'll find my way home."

"Oh, no. I think you'd best be coming with me."

And before she could protest they were moving again. She kept expecting to wake but she didn't, and when a branch slapped her cheek the pain had an alarming reality to it. She buried her face against Kirallen's back until they reached a clearing set with tents. Men on horses came and went, churning the field to mud. When Sarah dismounted her legs would barely hold her and she clutched Kirallen's arm as he led her into the largest of the tents. There were a number of men there but he strode past them with a wave of his hand, making for a corner that had been roughly partitioned with a high screen. She followed him and sank gratefully onto the small cot within. A boy appeared, dressed in a stained, patched tunic and carrying two buckets of steaming water.

"Welcome back, my lord," he said. He gave Sarah a casual nod, obviously unsurprised to see a strange woman in Kirallen's quarters. A moment later he returned with a flagon and two cups which he put on a small table.

"Go on then," Kirallen said to Sarah, gesturing toward a bucket. "You take one."

She looked doubtfully at the scummed water and dirty rag he handed her. Well, it was better than the mud, she supposed. She did the best she could to clean her face and hands, then ran her fingers through her hair and sat back on the bed. She reached for one of the cups and poured, but nearly choked on the heavy sweetness of the liquid. This must be mead, she thought. No wonder it had gone out of style.

Kirallen had stripped to the waist and was giving himself a vigorous toweling. Sarah tried not to stare but she could not help but see that he was all lean muscle, broad shouldered and slim-hipped, with dark curling hair hanging nearly to his waist. At last he sat on a hard stool and rested his elbows on his knees, staring at her.

"Well, look at you," he said softly. "Are you a fairy woman, then?"

Sarah blushed.

"What's your name, lady?"

"Sarah."

"Well, then, Sarah," he said. "What would you ask of me?" She looked into his bright eyes and thought, this is a dream, right? Nothing I do here really counts... And suddenly she smiled.

"A kiss."

He sat beside her on the bed and she leaned into his arms, turning her face up to his. He tasted of honey and his hair smelled of wood smoke and rainwater and wild herbs. His arms were very strong, very sure as they eased her back onto the hard cot. It was a long

time later, but all too soon for Sarah, when he pulled back and smiled into her eyes.

"Is that all, then?" he asked. "Just the one kiss?"

"Well," she said slowly, running a finger over his lips. "I'm only entitled to one request, aren't I?"

"Ah, I'm not counting that!" he laughed. She sighed as he leaned forward again, his mouth finding hers. The kiss deepened until she was dizzy with it. His lips moved to her neck and he pulled at the gown, baring her shoulder ...

"Duncan!"

He lifted his head slightly and said, "Aye, Godfrey?"

"What are you doing, man? We're all waiting for you."

"I'll be there in a moment."

"We've important matters to discuss — and where do I find you? Your wenching will be the ruin of you!"

Sarah sat up and looked at the man who spoke. He was heavyset and grim, his eyes hard above a grizzled beard. He gave her one contemptuous glance before stamping away.

"Who was that?"

"Godfrey. My wife's brother," Kirallen said, pulling the tunic over his head.

"Wife? You're married?"

"Well, of course I'm married."

"It doesn't seem to mean much to you!" she said tartly. "I gather I'm not the first to occupy this bed."

He grinned at her, unashamed. "I'd be lying if I said you were. But you are the fairest —"

"Ha!"

"It's true," he said. "As for my wife ... she cares nothing for what I do so long as I hold her lands together." He gave a heavy sigh. "And so I must be off. You'll wait for me, won't you?"

"I don't know."

"Now don't be saying that! Say you'll be here when I return."

Oh, what difference did it make if he was married or not? He wasn't real, none of it was real. She smiled and said, "I really don't know. But if I can, I will."

When he was gone she lay back, folding her arms under her head and staring up at the tent above her. It must be some deep-rooted Puritan instinct, she reflected, that kept her from making love to a stranger ... even one from her own imagination. She closed her eyes and concentrated on her own room, then opened them slowly. Above her head was the fabric of the tent. It was raining now and she watched as moisture gathered at the seams and dripped to the earthen floor below. The past had always sounded so romantic. She'd never really thought about the cold and damp ... or the fleas. She saw several hopping off the blanket. Standing, she stretched, then began to pace the small enclosure. Something should be happening, shouldn't it? Surely she hadn't come to this place — whatever it was — just to be reminded of her moral code! At last she peered around the

Artwork by Julia Lacquement

screen and saw half a dozen men gathered round a table in the far corner. She crept closer, keeping to the shadows against the wall.

They were arguing, she could hear their angry tones before she could make out the words. Godfrey pounded the table with one huge fist.

"Drive him out, I say! I dinna care who he says he is or from where he comes! He'll not be taking my lands into his dominion, not while I have breath —"

"Your lands?" Now Kirallen was on his feet. "You misspeak yourself, Godfrey. These are my lands and I'll do as I see fit."

"You willna," the older man said. "These are my sister's —"

Kirallen's arm moved with lightning swiftness and there it was, his sword, slicing through the air.

"You took the oath of fealty to me. Sit down and be still."

Godfrey, his face purple with rage, glared at him for a long moment. At last he flung himself into his seat.

"Now," Kirallen said, sheathing the sword. "I'll listen. Who's to speak?"

A red-haired man stood. "My lord, I say we fight. Who is this man, after all? A nobody, some king's bastard who seeks to set himself above us."

"Yet they say he's brought peace."

"Peace? Aye, the peace of the grave for any who go against him. But ye needn't worry about that, my lord —"

"It isn't that I fear him," Kirallen said impatiently. "Why should I? But I've heard tales ... strange tales ... And I've seen uncanny things myself these past weeks."

"Oh, you and your women who appear and disappear —" Godfrey began.

"Hold your tongue," one of the older men said sharply. "I saw her myself and she was not of this world. She saved our lord's life —"

"And for what purpose?" asked the red-haired man. "They say this king has a sorcerer about him and a sister who —"

"Balls," said Godfrey rudely. "He's nothing but another southerner trying to take what's ours. You may all be frightened of these fairies and elves, but I know the strength of my own arm and I fear no man, dead or living. And I'll tell you this, Duncan, if you give into him the people won't like it, they'll rise against you."

There was a murmur of agreement from around the table.

"All right," Kirallen said at last. "I'll think it over. The messenger said I have until tomorrow."

He turned and several voices spoke at once. "What is it?" he asked over his shoulder. "If you've anything to say I haven't heard, then do it now. I'll not stand here all the night rehashing the same stale thoughts." After a moment he nodded. "Very well then. Until tomorrow."

His face was dark as he turned the corner of the screen. Sarah was there before him and he sat beside her on the cot. "That was a sorry waste of time," he muttered, tossing back a cup of mead and pouring another. "Here, do you want some of this?"

She refused and he drank in silence, staring into space. At last he shook his head and turned to her. "Now tell me truly, lady, where you come from."

"Honestly? You won't believe me."

"That's as may be."

"I come from another time," she said. "A long, long time from now. I don't know exactly how I came here, perhaps because I was thinking of the sword ..."

"Sword? This sword?"

"Yes. They said there was a legend attached to it — that's how I knew about the woman, the one who healed you." And who was that woman? she wondered suddenly. Where did she fit into this tale?

"A legend?" he repeated, troubled. With a sudden change of mood he grinned. "So I'm not real?" He kissed her heartily. "Is this real, then?"

"Wait," she said, turning her head. "The woman — who was she?"

"She never said her name. But she had dark hair and eyes that looked right through me. Do you not know?"

"No. I wonder —"

"I've wondered enough for tonight," he said, pulling her close. "And tomorrow ... well, who knows what tomorrow will bring? I've thought until my head is sore, trying to fathom what's happened to me lately. Ever since I fell ill I've been living in a world I don't know any more, where things happen — uncanny things — and now you walk out of the mist and I cannot think any more, for the truth is I don't understand any of it. It's as though I'm caught up in something beyond my ken and — and I fear I'm but a pawn in a game I can't see. I don't know what's expected of me, what's right, and at times I'm afraid ..."

For the first time she saw him — really saw him as a person, not simply a character from a tale with whom she might amuse herself. He was frightened, she could see it in his eyes, and she felt both pity and a fierce protectiveness as she put her arms around him.

Later, much later, they lay still entwined. She listened to his even breaths and wondered what would happen to him ... and to her. She was afraid to sleep, for she didn't want to wake and find herself back at home, Duncan no more than a sweet memory that would fade through the years ... She tightened her arms around him. He was not a dream, he was real, and if he was not real then she had no need of reality, for she wanted nothing but him now.

She'd never known it could be like this. She hadn't even cared that they were five feet from the men who slept beyond the screen, they hadn't entered her thoughts even once as he brought her to a pitch of pleasure so keen that she'd cried out his name again and again. Afterward she'd wept, her heart too full for words, and he held her close.

"Stay with me," he whispered against her hair. "Don't leave. I'll keep you by me always, we'll never be parted. Shh ... it's all right, now," he gently wiped the tears from her face. "Sarah, I never knew my mother and I had no sisters. I was married at fifteen and my wife — she's older even than her brother and never wanted me in her bed. I was a little frightened of her —" he smiled a little and said, "perhaps I still am. She's very fierce. She doesn't know me at all, we meet so seldom. Two days after we were wed she sent me out to fight and here I've been ever since. The only women I've ever really known were camp followers and they were kind enough — but always, at the end, I paid them. Not that I grudged them that, it's how they live, but ...

"When I was very young," he said slowly, "I was taught to honor the Lady and I've tried, though there's been no one since I left my home to guide me ... And I've wondered if I somehow offended Her, for never, not once, has she shown me her face. Until tonight."

He took her face between his hands and said, "Whatever is to happen will not change what I feel now. I'll love you, I swear it, forever and aye."

She wanted nothing but to sleep be-

side him, to wake and see his face, his smile, to hear his voice. But she couldn't sleep, she mustn't, for fear that she would wake alone, a thousand years and more between them.

There had to be a way for her to stay — God knew she had nothing to go back to. She went over all that had happened and when she remembered the meeting she'd witnessed earlier she sat up.

"Duncan!"

"Is it dawn?" he mumbled.

"Who is he? The man you have to see tomorrow?"

"Who? Oh, Gowan is his name."

"Gowan? Gawaine? And his lord, the king?"

"Arthur." He raised himself on one elbow.

"What will you do?"

"Oh," he yawned. "I don't know. I'd like to meet him myself ... if it is true he'll bring the peace then yes, I'd join with him. I've been fighting half my life and I'm weary of it, killing men who've done me no harm and turning fertile fields to boneyards. I'd do anything to end it. But I don't know if this is the way. They're all against me and I fear this could bring more war."

"You mustn't fight him," she said urgently. "He'll win. He'll be the greatest king that's ever lived. You have to make peace, Duncan. Promise me."

He drew back a little, staring at her strangely.

"Then this is what you ask of me?"

"Yes, I — oh!" she stopped. "If I ask it you will do it, won't you?"

"I have sworn," he said slowly.

Before she'd been conscious on some level of the myriad noises of the camp: the stamp of horse's feet, the jingle of harness, the men snoring just beyond the screen. But all at once there was a great stillness that seemed to draw around them.

"Then swear to me," she said. "Swear that you will not fight him."

"I do so swear," he said solemnly.

The sounds of the night returned, strangely loud after the great silence.

"Sarah," he said with an uneasy laugh. "Are you a fairy woman indeed?"

"I don't know," she said, kissing him gently on the mouth. "And I don't care. I only know that I love you and will love you forever."

The word hung in the air, echoing in Sarah's mind as Duncan settled down to sleep. Forever. What did that mean when time itself was nothing as she'd thought it? At some point she must have dozed, for she dreamed she lay in a circle and there were people all around her.

"I'm calling an ambulance," someone said. Andrew?

"No, leave her. There's no danger, her vital signs are strong."

With the greatest effort of her life Sarah forced her eyes open. She was standing in the tent and by the light of the guttering candle she could see herself sleeping on the cot, her cheek resting on Duncan's chest and her hair flowing about them both like a mantle.

"You did well."

She turned and saw a man standing beside her. His beard, black shot with silver, flowed to his waist. Dark eyes regarded her kindly.

"Merlin," she said, the word not a question.

He nodded.

"You brought me here? But — but then who was she, the woman who healed Duncan?"

"Morgana. She seeks to undo what her brother does. But this time she has been defeated. He," Merlin gestured toward Kirallen, "would have slain Arthur in battle at her command."

Artwork by Julia Lacquement

"Oh, then I'm glad! Now he will join with him instead."

The enchanter looked away.

"What? What are you not telling me?"

"Child, go back. You do not need to know."

"But I do — I must. Tell me!" she demanded.

He sighed. "Lady Kirallen and her brother are alike in that they thirst for power. They will not welcome this peace. He will be dead before the week's end."

"Then I have betrayed him," she whispered. "Dear God, I've led him to his death. But why? Why me?"

"I could not interfere directly. So I brought you here — a woman who would know of Arthur's story and convince the young lord not to fight. But this," he nodded toward the bed, "I did not know this would happen. I am sorry."

"But why must he die? He's served your purpose once he's made the peace. Let me stay with him —"

"No. You do not belong here."

"Then send him with me."

"My dearest child," he said, his eyes dark pools of sorrow. "I cannot. But this I can do: when you return it will be as though this never happened."

"No," she cried. "Not that. I don't want to forget him — or what I have done tonight. He said he was a pawn and he was right ... we are all pawns in the hands of such as you."

He laid his hand on her shoulder. "Remember for as long as you need to remember. And then forget. Bright blessings on you, Sarah, for now and forevermore."

He bent and his lips touched her forehead.

When Sarah opened her eyes again she saw faces bent over hers, their expressions all of concern. But she did not stay to answer their questions. She ran the few blocks to the museum.

"We're closing in fifteen minutes," the guard said. "Why don't you come back tomorrow?"

"No, I have to see it now —"

She stood before the case where the sword was exhibited. It looked different here, laid out on crimson velvet. A relic of a time long gone, the strong brown hand that had held it no more than dust. The same hand that had caressed her so gently just a few hours ago ... thirteen hundred years ago ...

At last she picked up the guide book and read, turning the pages impatiently until she reached the legend itself.

"... but the young lord would not be swayed, declaring that he'd been sent a vision and could not do other than make the peace. And so it was done, but when Lady Kirallen heard of it she was full wroth and demanded he be brought to death.

"They took him in a grove, at prayer. And it is said that once he knew defeat was certain he grew very calm, meeting his death with such courage that many there began to repent of their deed before even it was done. Some of the men begged him to reconsider but he refused, saying that his life belonged to God, who had blessed him above all other men.

"But Lady Kirallen, not content with his death, demanded that his heart be cut from him and brought to her on his own sword. When she received it she cried, "A traitor's heart and a traitor's death," laughing with such malice that all present were frightened. And the people, hearing of her wicked deed, were filled with anger and disgust. As one they flocked to Arthur's banner, demanding justice of the king.

"The sword, along with the lands and title, passed to Kirallen's youngest brother, and then to his son and to his, until at last it was lost and the young lord's tale dwindled to a story to be told about a winter's fire ..."

Sarah stood, the tears streaming down her face. He had been no martyr but a young man struck down in his prime — and still he had called himself blessed. And yet, she thought, her mind groping for the truth, he had in the end brought peace. Was it possible that Merlin's was not the only will at work?

A door opened and she heard voices coming from within. One rose above the others, so familiar that her heart stopped. "I'll not wear the bloody kilt and that's the end of it! They're coming to see the sword, not me. If I'd known what would happen I'd have left the damned thing in the ground!"

The door slammed and a man walked into the room.

"Duncan?" she whispered.

"Here, now, what's this?" he said kindly. "It is a sad story, I grant you, but not so sad as all that!"

This wasn't Duncan, though there was a resemblance. This man was older, thirty or more, and built far more sturdily, though he had the same dark hair and bright eyes.

"I'm sorry —" Sarah choked. "I'll go now."

"Now what did you call me?" he said suddenly. "Duncan is my name, though I never use it. I go by my second name, Michael — are you a witch, then?" he laughed and she heard the echo of another voice asking, "Are you a fairy woman, then?"

Looking at her stricken face he added quickly, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. But if you only knew how many women have told me they're sorceresses who lived before at Arthur's court ..." he smiled wryly and she smiled back.

"It isn't that," she said. "I'm not offended."

"Then what is it?" he asked gently.

"I — why, I —" she stopped. She put a hand to her face and knew that she'd been crying. But why, exactly, she couldn't say.

"It's all so sad," she said at last.

"What is? Listen — what's your name? Well, Sarah, I need a drink. And from the looks of it, you could use one, too. I know a pub near here where we can get —"

"Mead?" she said without thinking.

He stared. "My brother makes mead. He keeps his own bees and —" he shook his head and said firmly. "I think you'd best be coming with me."

Sarah looked back at the sword. It was a tragic story but she couldn't remember why it had moved her so. After all, it had happened a very long time ago. She smiled as she turned to Michael and took his offered arm. ❄

E.A. Minogue writes: "Up until the time I was twelve I knew exactly what I wanted to be: a writer. Unfortunately, somewhere during my teenage years I forgot that valuable piece of information and spent many years searching for my path. I have held numerous jobs — accountant, bartender, secretary, and Greenpeace door-to-door canvasser to name a few. But it is only lately that I remembered what I set out to do and am now happily pursuing my dream." She lives outside Philadelphia with her hasband and son.

Julia Lacquement recently moved her studio to Arizona, where she splits her time between gallery pieces and SF/fantasy illustrations. Her masterful watercolors have won her multiple awards, and may be found on CD-ROMS and T-shirts as well as fine art prints. Her main outlet for black and white illustrations is this magazine.

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THE LAST WORD

by Rachel E. Holmen

In Portland, Oregon, on Friday February the 13th, 1998, at Good Samaritan Hospital, author Jo Clayton lost her valiant fight against multiple myeloma. According to her friend Mark Bourne, "she died peacefully, with family and friends present. Per her wishes, Jo is to be cremated, her ashes scattered in the California redwoods. An emergency medical fund named for Jo is being set up by fans and friends in Portland." I was able to visit Jo about a year ago while I was in Portland; I offered to sew her a hat (chemotherapy had left her bald) and she asked for a green corduroy captain's cap. She had hopes of being able to go home, but apparently this never came to pass, and I never found the right pattern for her cap, either, a failure which will haunt me.

Jo was an editor's delight to work with, cooperative about changes and helpful in providing such things as lists of unusual words and their correct spellings, to aid the copyeditors. A friend who had lived in numerous European countries said that of the current crop of sf and fantasy writers, only Jo Clayton and C.J. Cherryh could really convey alien cultures in a believable way.

Nick Jainschigg took delight in his art assignments to illustrate her stories, as is evident from his exuberant drawings of the various creatures who animated Jo's tales.

She never had much fame, though we hoped that would improve over time after she hired the same agent that Katherine Kerr uses. She had a speech problem which kept her shy, and she wasn't the kind of thin, photogenic woman who would have done well on the TV talk show circuit; rather, she wore mannish, practical glasses and her clothes were plain. Still, I imagine that the students she taught (in the years before she became a full-time writer) thought she was terrific. I'll miss her.

On a happier note, I received a clipping recently from the Tillamook, Oregon, *Headlight Herald*, showing author Jackie Shank holding an issue of *FANTASY Magazine* with her story in it. And Darrell Schweitzer has announced his wedding to fellow author Mattie Brahen in April.

Next issue, the cover story (assuming we can get interior illustrations done in time) is "Ivy" by Esther Friesner. We already have a knockout cover from British artist Mark Harrison. (Speaking of knockouts, I hope you liked David A. Cherry's work on this issue. The artist was coping with ailing parents, children who had the flu, and competing assignments, but he turned in a beautiful cover, I thought. Of course, Susan Shwartz's story was inspiring.) Darrell Schweitzer shares his interview with Robert Holdstock, a British fantasy writer not as well-known to American readers as he should be. Other stories coming up include "Porsche Divine" by Peter Krug (an old folksinging buddy of mine, known in the sixties for some very entertaining "talking blues" songs), "Wild Swan" by India Edghill, a new "Keighley" story by Dorothy J. Heydt, "Neighborhood Watch" by Lee Martindale, stories by Deborah Wheeler and Susan Dexter and Richard Purtill and Lyn McConchie and Laura Underwood and Janna Silverstein — a true embarrassment of riches!

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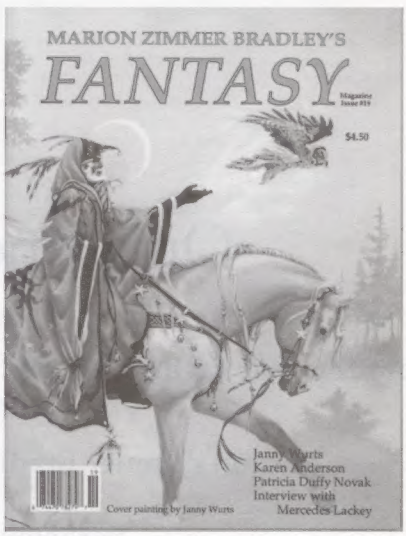

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The Cauldron — Issue #39

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❑ **Some Enchanted Evening** by Yvonne Coats	❑ Margaret Organ-Kean
❑ **The Enchantment** by John Buentello	❑ Lynne Fahnestalk
❑ **Dragon's Treasure** by Robyn Patricia Hansell	❑ Margaret Davis
❑ **The Valley of Stones** by Patricia Duffy Novak	❑ K. L. Darnell
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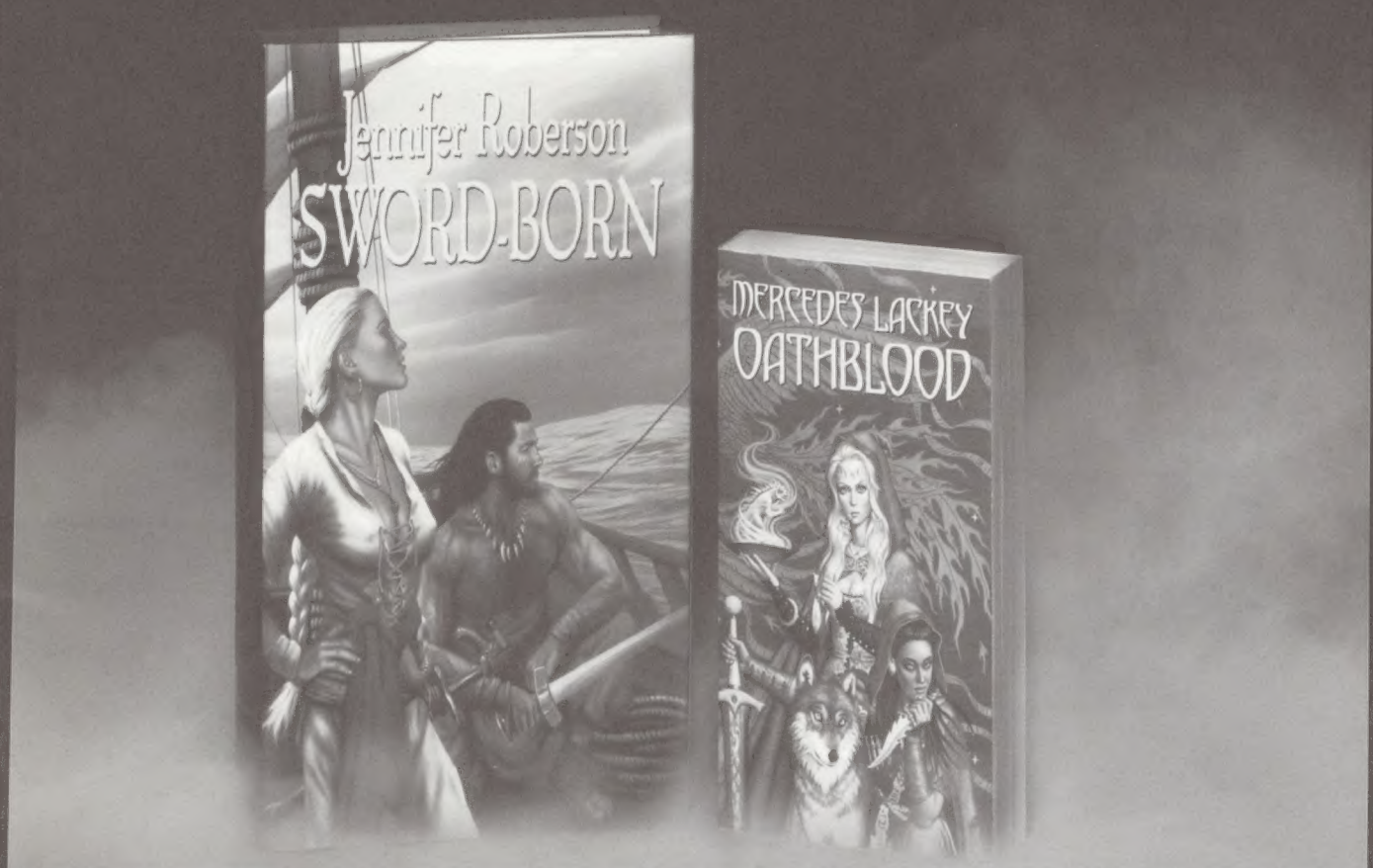

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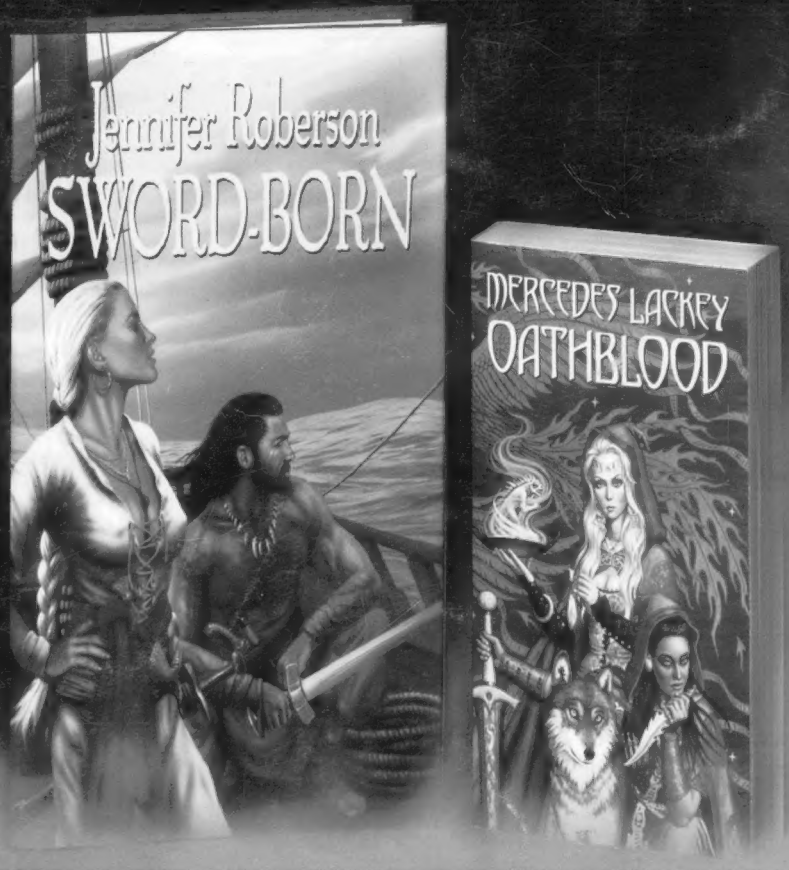

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